$72 MILLION INDIE THE STORY OF STAR CITIZEN

gamesTM

www.gamestm.co.uk

Xbox One | PS4 | iPad | iPhone | PS Vita | 3DS | Arcade | Retro



PS4 AND XBOX ONE
LATEST GAMES TESTED

20 MUST-WATCH INDIE GAMES

HIGHLIGHTS

- **THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT**
- BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT
- **PROJECT CARS**
- DEAD ISLAND EPIDEMIC
- **TOTAL WAR ATTILA**
- EVOLVE
- **MORTAL KOMBAT X**

BUSTING CALL OF DUTY

Visceral's plans to revolutionise Battlefield and launch into Star Wars

RESIDENT EVIL'S LAST CHANCE?

Capcom gives the classic series one more go with Revelations 2

ROCKSTAR EXPOSED

Inside gaming's most secretive studio

COMPLETE GUIDE TO FINAL FANTASY

A journey through the JRPG's history

ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
DigitalEdition
GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 158

As I recall, the first exposure I had to *Grand Theft Auto* was probably the opening of its first 3D instalment, *GTA III*. It felt like tucking into a roast dinner after weeks of living off microwave meals. It was a feast of gaming possibility. The driving, shootouts, mission, characters and bedlam that could be caused all felt so full and rich with detail. If I might extend the food metaphor a little further, I gorged myself, fit to burst, filling the day with as much *GTA* as it could stand.


GTA III offered a level of player freedom and visual wonder that Rockstar North has continued to evolve and improve over the years, but ultimately it's always trying to recapture that spectacle, or at least it is to my eyes. It's often hard to tell what Rockstar is aiming for, because ultimately it doesn't often feel the need to share its creative vision with the world beyond just releasing a few trailers and screens, leading up eventually to the game itself. Getting to glimpse behind the curtain is a rare treat.


And so it was a delight to get some insight into Rockstar's creative process from Craig Conner this issue. Learning about how his processes and those of the team evolved over 20 years working on all of the *Grand Theft Auto* games, as well as *Manhunt*, was wonderful to uncover. I'm sure you'll enjoy it as much as I did.

Jon Gordon

Jonathan Gordon
EDITOR






158

Contents

www.gamestm.co.uk 158 | 15



20 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

PREVIEWS



24 Project Cars

FAVOURITES

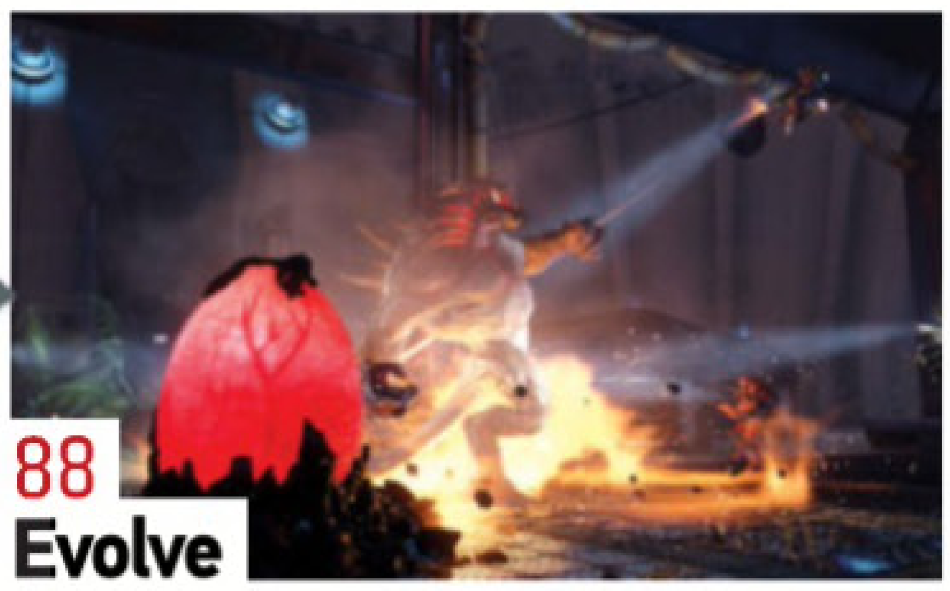


DISCUSS



40 Batman: Arkham Knight

FEATURES



88 Evolve

REVIEWS



96 Grim Fandango

RETRO





> Have your say on anything videogame related at **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum** and you could feature in **games™**

facebook.com/gamesTM @gamesTMmag www.gamestm.co.uk

Turn to page 84

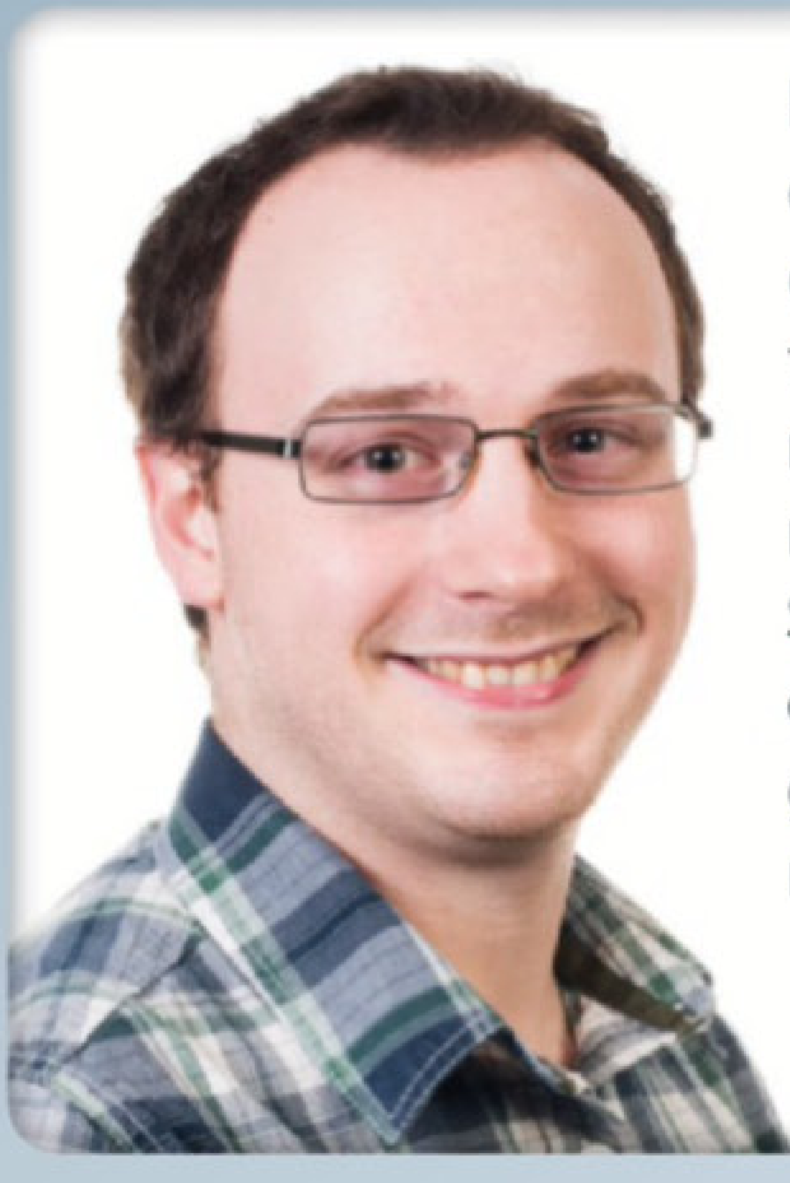
44 Feature

BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE

Visceral explains its plans to reinvigorate Battlefield, return to Dead Space and launch into Star Wars

Join our games™ Reader Panel today!

Take our 3-minute survey at **gamestm.co.uk/survey** and win a place on our panel



Hi there. The **games™** team is a dedicated one and we know as one of our readers you're just as committed to **games™** as we are. With that in mind this year we want to make the magazine even better with your help. Simply answer a few questions, and you could be selected to join our first ever **games™** panel. I'm looking forward to reading your ideas and feedback.

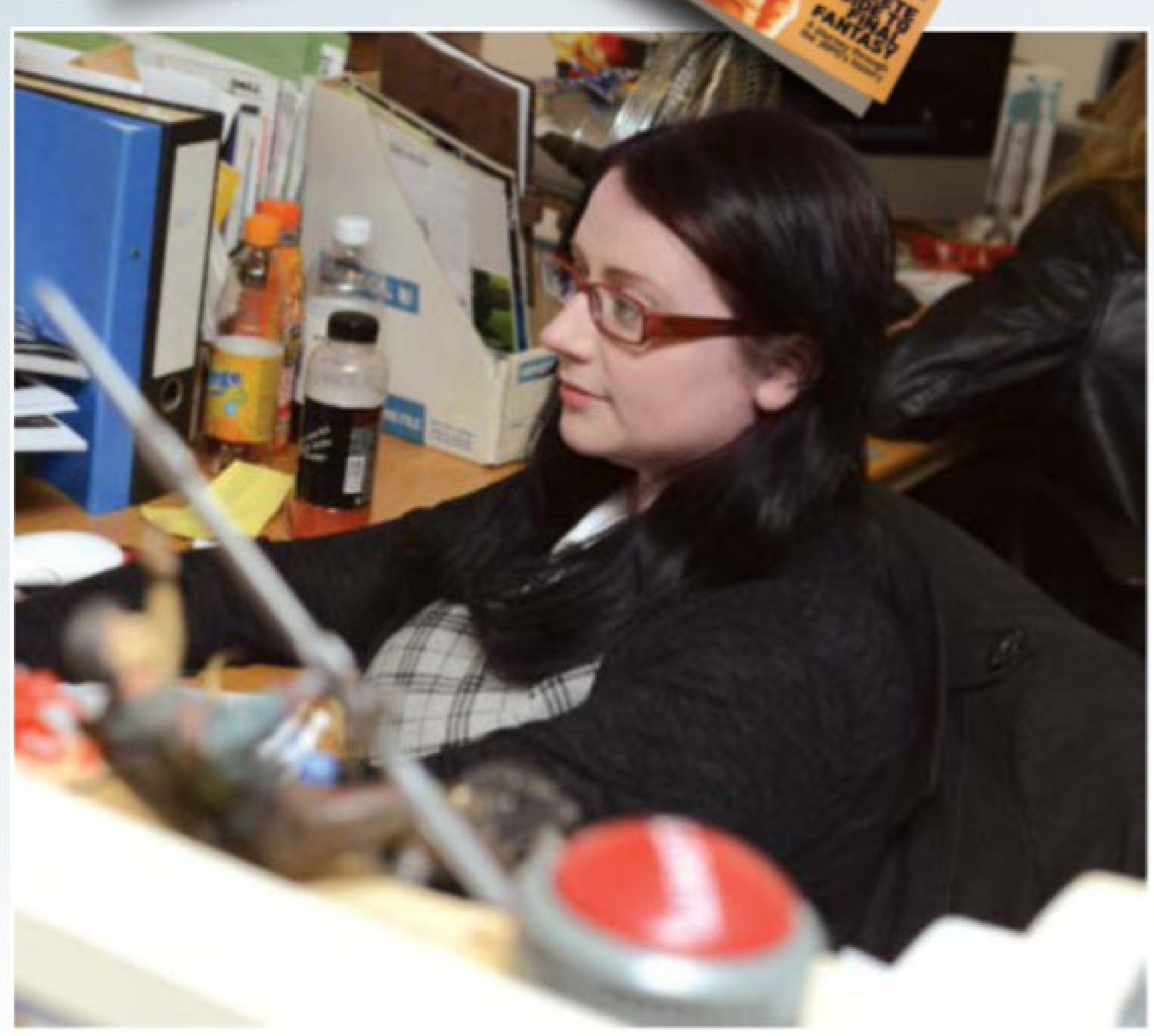
Jon Gordon

Jonathan Gordon
Editor





Join our panel and help us make the magazine even better!





Take the survey on any device

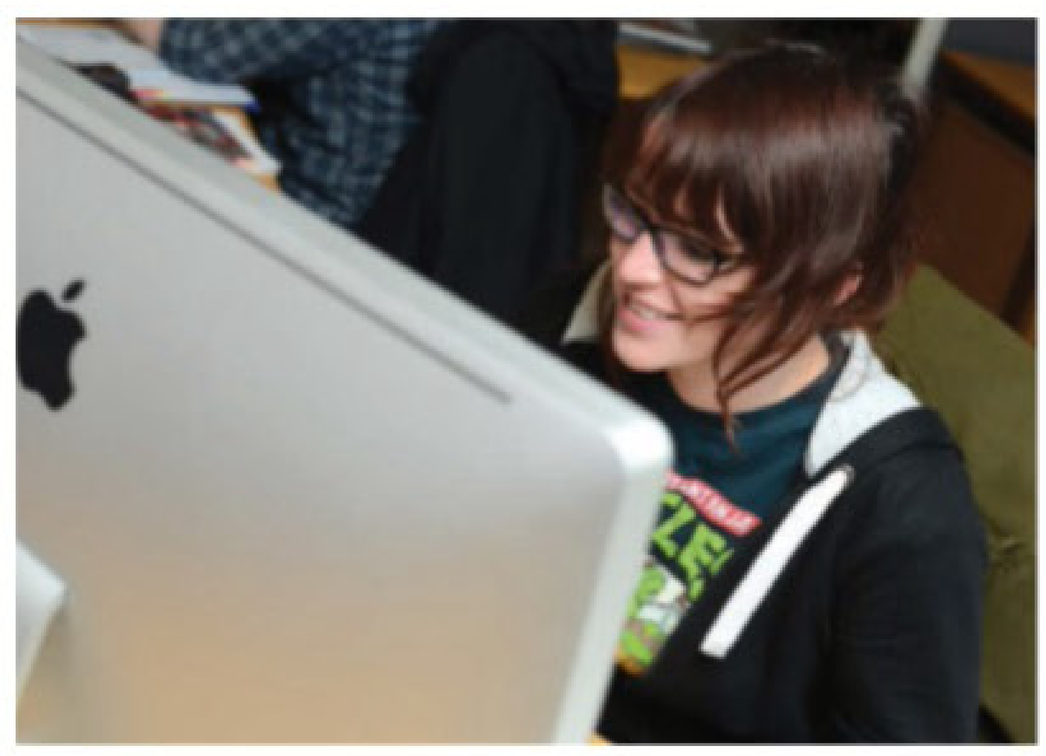
Complete our survey to join our games™ panel and:

- See new ideas and changes before anyone else
- Get invited to attend special events in your area
- Test third-party products for review
- Have a chance to meet the **games™** team
- Shape the future issues of the magazine
- Enter into exclusive competitions

Step 1 Complete survey → **Step 2** Get involved → **Step 3** Earn rewards



Take the chance to get closer to the team than ever before.





Only takes 3 mins!

Complete our survey and win your place today

www.gamestm.co.uk/survey

Discuss



(JAPANESE HARDWARE IN LONDON)

Who Is The New 3DS Actually For?

→ Console launches are usually met with excitement, but Nintendo's latest iteration of the 3DS has inspired little enthusiasm. In light of that, we found ourselves asking… who's actually going to buy it?

There have now been four generations of 3DS… within one generation. That doesn't make sense, right? Nintendo has offered four different versions of the basic platform during the 3DS' short lifespan. The original, more dinky console (the one that got all the bad press for giving kids migraines) was succeeded by the 3DS XL – a machine that was exactly the same as its predecessor, except for its screen size. People bought it in droves, still – it was a good opportunity for those that hadn't adopted on release to catch up. It made sense.

Then, in 2013, Nintendo surprised everyone with the announcement of the 2DS – a console



Above Nintendo is teaming up with big mobile titles like *Puzzles & Dragons* to keep itself relevant.

aimed at children (but weren't they all?). It did away with the 3DS' core gimmick – the titular 3D – but that was OK, because its launch was tied in with the release of *Pokémon X/Y*, games that would go on to sell over 12 million copies, mostly in specially prepared bundles.

But now Nintendo has released the New 3DS and New 3DS XL – consoles that at first glance seem to have no obvious target audience. The people that would initially want a 3DS have already had *three* chances to pick up iterative models, so we can safely assume that section of the fandom has bought into the console. Then there's the younger market – with the 2DS currently on the shelves, and concerns about

DATA STREAM → DARK SOULS II: SCHOLAR OF THE FIRST SIN WILL BE ARRIVING ON XBOX ONE AND PS4

Your guide to the essential stories







the impact of stereoscopic 3D on children's developing eyesight, they're ruled out of the New 3DS remit.

So you're left with those that already own a 3DS. Or a 3DS and a 2DS. Or a 3DS, a 2DS and a 3DS XL. And guess what – they'll most likely be picking up a New 3DS XL Limited Edition, too – the Zelda Edition sold so well retailers had to cancel pre-orders because Nintendo couldn't fulfil initial demand. Who's buying these machines? Who's running Nintendo's warehouse shelves to console extinction?

The dyed-in-the-wool Nintendo fans. We've been in conversation with a variety of Nintendo communities, as well as some more general gaming ones, and we've identified three major target audiences: *Monster Hunter* players, people that bought the *original* 3DS at launch, and collectors. It's interesting to note here that Nintendo has stated that it's been looking across at the mobile market model as it realigns itself with the modern consumer… most notably the idea that consumers want new hardware every year.

> "This could be the end of the 'traditional' generation model for handhelds… you could call it cynical or call it genius"

You can see how that mobile influence has informed the design of the New 3DS: it's like a new model of the iPhone – the New iPhone, if you will. It's got a few new features, nothing spectacular. The C-Stick control nub is great – having the ability to pan the camera is a fantastic addition to a 3D console, one we're surprised hasn't come around sooner. We've been playing around with it, and the nub actually gives you more tempered control than a dual analogue stick would. The UI has been improved somewhat – nice, but not vital – and the internet connection has drastically improved. It's still not a patch on Sony's handheld efforts, but Nintendo has never done *too* well with online connectivity, has it?

Then you've got the frame-rate buffs and hardware improvements: the processor in the machine is practically twice as powerful as the 'old' 3DS models, meaning that old games *do* perform better (no more painful loading times on *Fire Emblem*, for example). This makes Nintendo's biggest 3DS games – *Smash Bros.*, *Mario Kart*, *Monster Hunter*, *Pokémon* – a better playing experience, generally. What hardcore Nintendo fan can resist that? The New 3DS also has two extra back buttons – useless for 3DS games now, but in upcoming releases they're vital… making your old 3DS redundant.

So does that point to Nintendo doubling-down on its hardcore fans – the ones that have always supported them anyway? Does the manufacturer plan now to release a new bit of hardware every year, slowly adding features depending on what fans (and developers) require? This could be the end of the 'traditional' generation model for handhelds, replaced instead with a progressive system that you need to keep up to date with in order to play every game you want to play.

You could call it cynical, or you could call it genius – a lot of 3DS players seem to be happy to buy a new model if it means they get play *Xenoblade Chronicles 3DS*, or get extra features in *Majora's Mask 3D*. If Nintendo isolates a core of iterative fans, it can keep innovating its hardware models whilst permanently retaining a solid fanbase.

The New 3DS, what seems like a random endeavour at first, could actually be the start of one of the smartest hardware campaigns in gaming.

Above The New 3DS' *Xenoblade* remake has swayed a lot of Nintendo fans into buying the new hardware.

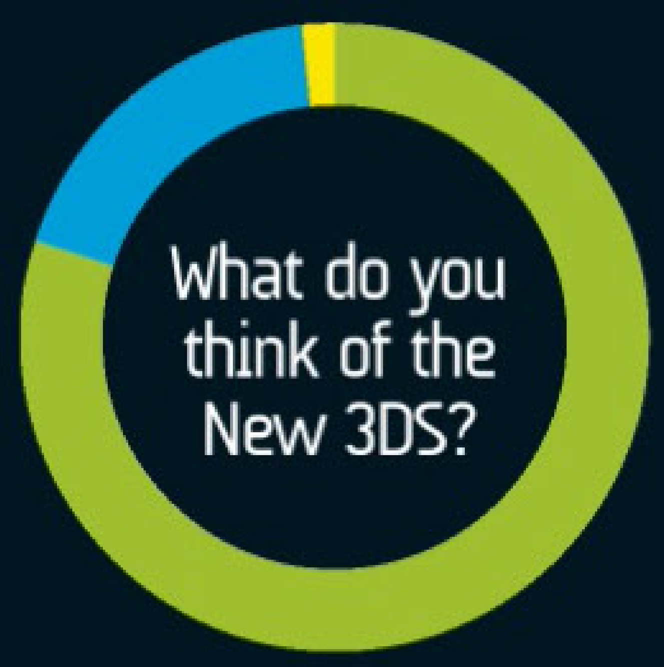


Above Amiibo functionality is another advantage Nintendo's newest handheld has over its predecessors.



Reader Reaction

We asked what you thought of the New 3DS – and the hardcore fans came out in force to support it. Keep telling us your thoughts on Twitter



I got myself the original 3DS on launch, not bothered by the larger sizes so have never "upgraded" until now. A few things sold me on the New 3DS – first was having the second stick built in, I wish Nintendo had done this before *Kid Icarus* was released as the controls for that game make it near unplayable. Add to this I bought the Circle Pad Pro also as soon as possible. Better 3D tracking was huge, I like quirky uses of tilt controls but combined with 3D it's a "NOMBO". Finally the biggest sell for me was simply *Xenoblade Chronicles*. Maybe one of my favourite games of all time.
Psientologist

Despite buying everything Nintendo over the last 25+ years I wasn't deemed good enough for the Ambassador version, but I'll be getting the MM XL, pre-ordered early.
James

I knew Nintendo would bring out a revised model of 3DS, so I waited to upgrade. Nearly bought an XL last year, but the announcement of the New 3DS models made me wait.
Merman

I'll be picking up a new 3DS XL at release, I like my standard 3DS but as a regular user of the Circle Pad Pro I find it far too unwieldy to use when I'm out and about. The new C-Stick seems like it'll solve that problem.
Dayle Cartwright

BETHESDA WILL BE HOSTING ITS FIRST EVER E3 SHOWCASE THIS YEAR. FALLOUT 4 PERHAPS?



(EVOLVE OR DIE)

Keeping The Monster Alive

→ We spoke to Chloe Skew, producer at Turtle Rock, about how the studio plans to keep its unique beast alive following Evolve's recent launch, and the difficulties with online games' longevity

How has the studio reacted to the networking issues you've experienced from the alpha and beta?
[After the beta], we're still working on matchmaking, and we've been getting a really great response from people that have been jumping in solo, but it's been slightly more difficult for people that have been in queues in duos or trios. I think that was mostly down to the number of people playing, though – for the most part [the beta] was spectacularly more successful than the alpha.

There was some backlash towards the DLC packs you announced to launch alongside the game. How did the studio respond to that?
Phil [Robb, creative director] takes all this stuff very personally. We have a promise to the community on our website: 'we're gamers, making games, for other gamers'. It's a difficult space, just talking about DLC at all, because I think gamers are so fatigued with the typical DLC cycle… but I think if [our strategy] was to be looked at objectively, you'd see there are a *tonne* of options about what you can have and how you can get it, and hopefully it will still feel very inclusive, even if you never buy DLC. It's important to Phil and the rest of the studio to make sure that we're never separating the community.

That open structure with the DLC is interesting – you don't see that around very much any more…
Yeah, it's really good actually. So, I can play with a friend who's got all the new Hunters, and I've not bought any, and we go into a match as just a duo. My friend plays with a new character, but wants to shield me so switches into [a non-paid character] or something, which opens up the new Hunter who *I* can then switch into. I just can't choose to deploy as that character myself from the start.

So it's like 'try-before-you-buy'?
That's what we're aiming for, yeah! There's so much that we want to do with this game, and the original scope was 12 Hunters and three Monsters, but our team, with their limitless creativity, want to make more. Thing is, making more Monsters and Hunters costs more, and it's a long process, and there are a lot of people involved so I… I just hope people start to see what we're planning as the game comes out and come around to the idea that we're not out to steal their money, we just want to give them more content. We have to fund that in some way, y'know?



Below Different Monsters will require different approaches in *Evolve*, and Hunters may have to switch up their strategies on the fly.

You mentioned that you've got large plans for the game – now it's launching can you talk about how long you plan to support it?
Well, that really depends on the community. We have plans, certainly: in our PC Monster Race edition, we have a six-month service with four Hunters that have been teased, with another two after that too. That should take us out quite a bit after launch. We've already got people on the forums coming up with ideas for new Monsters, too; 'build



→ BIOWARE HAS CANCELLED ITS PLANNED MMO SHADOW REALMS, WHICH WAS ANNOUNCED AT GAMESCOM

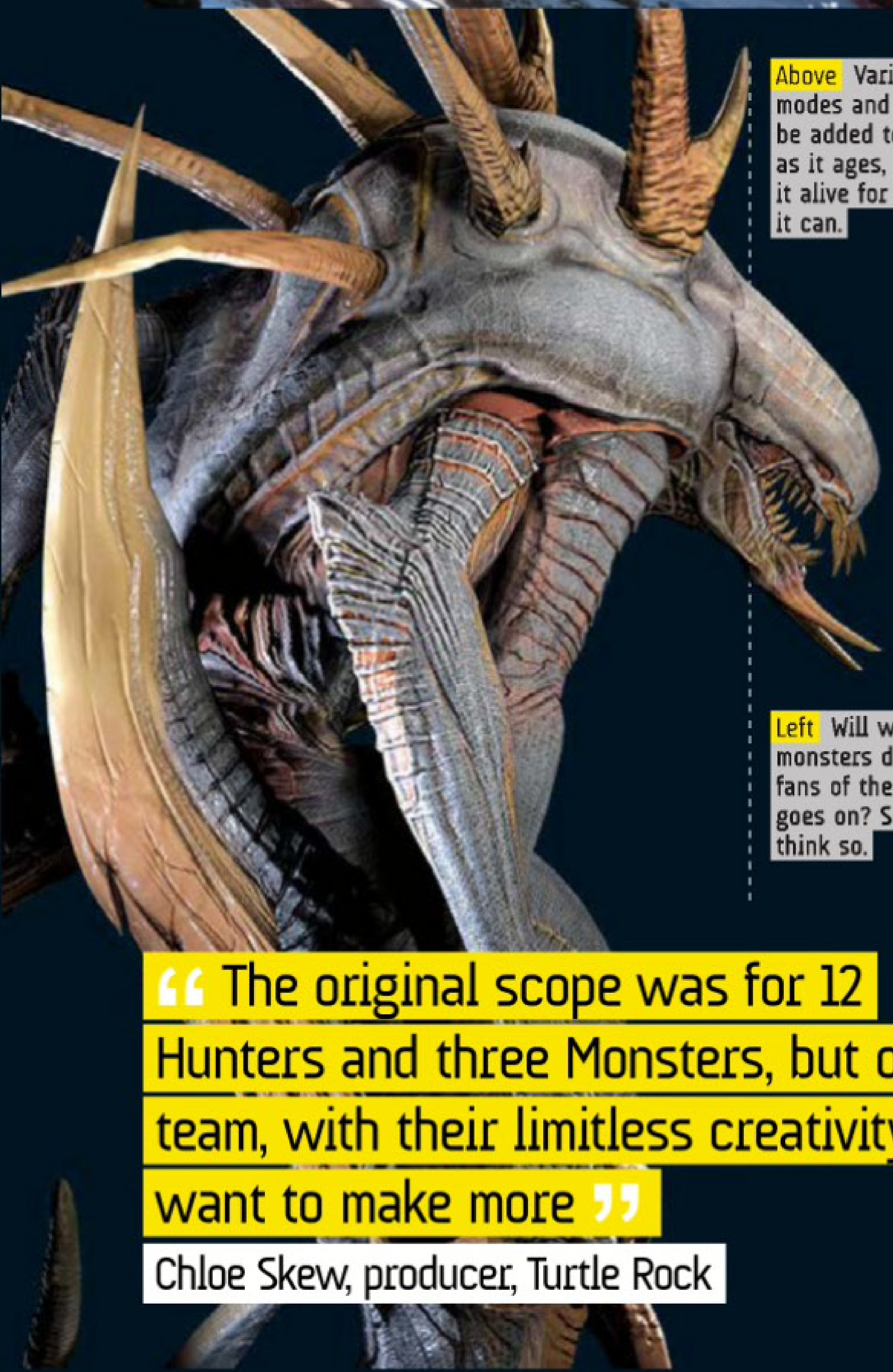


Inset Concerns about balancing, like the Wraith being overpowered, will be addressed as the game keeps evolving.





Above Various new game modes and monsters will be added to the game as it ages, too, keeping it alive for as long as it can.



Left Will we see more monsters designed by fans of the game as time goes on? Skew seems to think so.

> "The original scope was for 12 Hunters and three Monsters, but our team, with their limitless creativity, want to make more"
>
> Chloe Skew, producer, Turtle Rock

a turtle Monster!' they'll say, and they'll come up with the abilities and all sorts.

We've noticed that the development team are extremely active on the forums and with the community – will that continue post-launch?
Absolutely. I know that's something that's very close to Chris' [Ashton, design director] heart. Right now he's up to his elbows in charts and telemetry data and all sorts, and he's constantly putting out graphs and data regarding what people are using what weapons, who's dealing the most damage and so on... we get to look at that and say 'OK, it seems some people had frustrating experiences with this' and we adjust it. But you can't just make someone deal less damage without balancing it out elsewhere, so Chris really likes to go into that with the community and hear them out. It's nice seeing how much the devs have run with being involved with people out there, and how the players have responded to that. It's definitely something we'll be continuing – if they want to talk to us, we *definitely* want to talk to them.

How do you plan on managing players – preventing drop-outs, abusive behaviour and so on?
[Laughs] Well, I play *League Of Legends* and *seriously*, that can get nasty sometimes. So we're aware of the behaviour you can get online, and how difficult others can make it to play, so it's important to us that we have systems in place to counter that. We're imposing loss penalties for people that drop out of games, for a start, but we're going to monitor it all *very* closely.

***Evolve* is breaking ground as an asymmetrical online game – has that been a pressure during development?**
Well, when you're creating any kind of game with the potential reach and exposure that *Evolve*'s got, you have to consider the impact of that. Phil and Chris made a game that they wanted to play – they didn't go into it thinking 'yeah, let's revolutionise multiplayer!' [Laughter] It's a challenge that they took on, and all their hard work with balancing and working things out might lead to progress in the games space, sure, but that wasn't their goal. They literally just made the game they wanted to play.

SO... WHO IS EVOLVE FOR?

→ We asked Chloe Skew who exactly Evolve was made for – moving into the new 4v1 asymmetrical multiplayer genre, there isn't an awful lot of market research pointing at who'd play it...

■ "I don't think *Evolve* was targeted at a specific audience in any way – Phil and Chris really did just make a game that they thought would be really fun to play and kinda said 'oh, no-one's done this? Maybe we should!' when they began production. So you can't read too much into any kind of grand strategy they had for *Evolve* that way. It does appeal to FPS players, though – it's a different approach to what they'd be used to, I think. And then you've got the completely different side when you play as the Monster, which is definitely unique. I have trouble thinking of other games where you control a creature the way you do in *Evolve*, and the difference in playstyle between Goliath, Kraken and Wraith – I think – will attract more people to the game for sure."

→ FORMER RARE DEVS HAVE FORMED PLAYTONIC GAMES TO CREATE A BANJO-KAZOOIE INSPIRED PLATFORMER



KONGETSU

TO BE THIS SCREWED TAKES AGES

The little hedgehog who couldn't



As a card-carrying member of the Mega Drive Army from back in the day, it hurts to see Sega like this. Fans already had to deal with the pain of seeing the world-famous firm barged out of the console market by the PS2 juggernaut, and now news that it is downscaling its business to focus on mobile and digital titles just feels like a nail in the coffin of one of the most beloved names in all of gaming.

In truth, the new plan doesn't sound all that different from Sega's recent activity anyway. Early in the PS360 generation, it would take risks and put its name to creative titles like *Resonance Of Fate*, *Viking: Battle For Asgard* and *Vanquish*, but by the dawn of a new wave of consoles, Sega was all but absent from the console market. None of these sold that well and you could see Sega growing ever more cautious as the generation wore on – bankers like *Football Manager* still trickle out but the release schedule hasn't offered anything particularly new and/or exciting to look forward to for years now.

But moreover, it's been the publisher's reliance on an old-fashioned business model that has let it down most. Its peers have already embraced the digital age (with the exception of Nintendo, which remains a law unto itself) and have proven earners in the mobile sector. But as proven by the recent release of *Sonic Boom*, Sega still seems to think that it can turn out any old thing with a blue hedgehog on the cover and expect it to sell. News flash: that stopped working a decade ago. After having a string of great titles that all underperformed, it's no great surprise that the publisher pulled the plug on that angle, but the problem came in the fact that it had nothing to replace it, leading to that aforementioned barren release schedule.

Truth be told, this proposed shift is perhaps the best thing for Sega right now. Keeping costs down and finally getting its roots into the lucrative digital marketplace should help stabilise the firm and prevent a complete collapse. But it also needs to take a good hard look at its portfolio to see how it could better be utilised – the *Yakuza* series has a solid overseas following (to the point where Sony has now coughed up for localisation of several upcoming titles), for instance, while it has just been sat on *Phantasy Star Online 2* for years. There's already an English version out there and it's more or less the same game as *Destiny*. Which, last time we checked, was doing pretty darn well. Sure, Sega would struggle to front the marketing money Activision has thrown at *Destiny*, but word of mouth sales are stronger today than in years – just look at *DriveClub*'s sales resurgence in the wake of its vast improvement after a rough launch.

> Sega still seems to think that it can turn out any old thing with a blue hedgehog on the cover and expect it to sell

So never fear – the House Of Hedgehog will live on. But this next year or so will be incredibly important and if it doesn't manage to get its act together with this new direction, there could be rings *everywhere*.

Luke Albiges is Deputy Editor of **Play** magazine and would very much like to play *PSO2* now, please

IMPORT WATCH

RYU GA GOTOKU ZERO: CHIKAI NO BASHO

● The western world has been crying out for a new *Shenmue* game for years, seemingly unaware that Sega's ground-breaking series has been alive in all but name. *Yakuza* is *Shenmue*'s spiritual successor, and this new prequel entry is likely to help push PS4 sales in a market where demand for next-gen consoles isn't what it is in the rest of the world.



eSports 101

Your Guide to Pro Gaming



Why do I always get LAN flu?



We are now exiting the flu season – that time of year when the morning commute to work becomes that little bit more exciting than just the normal "Will my train turn up?" game. You get to play musical chairs (if you can get a seat) once the train has arrived to avoid the deluge of coughs and sneezes as your carriage becomes a scene from *The Walking Dead*. Some years we come away from this season as winners and other years we are not so lucky.

However, for an eSports player, spectator or organiser, this is not a once a year experience. No, this game has morphed into a yearlong escapade of cat and mouse. But, a bit like the Scottish premiership, it's not really a proper game when you know who the winner will be before you begin, and in this case the cat always wins. Now of course I'm not talking about some giant monster cat, like the type spotted by 84 year-old Mrs Smith in the tabloids every couple of months. This cat is of course a metaphor for LAN flu, the deadliest type of flu to gamers who are foolish enough to go outside after competition. Approximately 48 hours post any eSports event, you enter what I like to call the "Danger Zone". This period is fraught with nervous angst and tension. These feelings you can learn to deal with; it's amazing what the human body and nervous system can handle when pushed to the extreme. No, what you really need to worry about is the fear!

> Approximately 48 hours post any eSports event, you enter what I like to call the "Danger Zone". This period is fraught with nervous angst and tension

Most normal humans have not been built to deal with fear for long sustained periods; most of us will crack like an egg on a frying pan and quickly unravel into banshee-like movements while screaming German profanities at the top of our lungs. But then it happens: you cough, you sneeze, and then you cough again. You put it down to dust, but it happens again and again. Next, every muscle in your body begins to ache; you put it down to that rigorous workout you did seven years ago. Wait, now you can't swallow and when you look in the mirror you can no longer recognise your own face. It's over, you have LAN FLU!

So what has lead us to death's door? "All those unwashed teenagers," you might say, "they carry lots of germs and never wash," and so the denial begins. But actually what causes LAN flu is you. You have just spent the last four days on about three hours sleep a night, on a diet of burgers, chips, kebabs and pizzas and nothing but sugary soft drinks, energy drinks, and no doubt stronger liquids as well. This is what has lead you here, not the teenagers at all. No, living like a teenager for four days, that's what your downfall was!

And you won't learn from this, as those past four days were some of the most enjoyable, sociable, laugh out loud days you have had in months and you are already counting down the hours until the next bout of LAN flu. For those of you still stuck playing musical chairs on the flu train, you don't know what you're missing!



Pro gamers don't often train their bodies up as well as their reflexes, but they probably should.

Paul Kent has over 16 years experience in the eSports industry and is currently Esports Director at the UK's leading eSports company Gfinity

WHY I ♥... HOMEWORLD

CHRIS MCQUINN, DESIGNER, DRINKBOX

“A game that has always stuck with me and really influenced me was Homeworld*. I think what stuck with me so much was that it was a space set game, and it always made me fall in love with my fleet – it created a really strong narrative and a dramatic build up. I remember the final fight of that game, the way they used music and committed it to the story, and how it all came together... I’ve never had a more emotional response to a game. I remember cheering up – physically shouting at the computer as I was going into the final battle. It made me realise that games could engage me in such a way that film or TV shows never would. I’ve never had that response from anything other medium, except in a game. I guess it always reminds me that you can always really engage and commit your player emotionally, at a really intense level, and that you* should *[as a developer], too.”*



> "I remember the final fight of that game, the way they used music and committed it to the story, and how it all came together… I've never had a more emotional response to a game"

CHRIS MCQUINN, DESIGNER, DRINKBOX





"In terms of content, everything is complete. It's all finished. All that's left for us to do now is erase the last few bugs that are still in there"

MILES TOST CD PROJEKT RED

He might not be a bad guy, but he's certainly not entirely benevolent either. If Geralt isn't getting paid, it's unlikely he's going to be happy about putting himself in danger for people that generally can't stand his presence.



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

CONCEPT ■ The third in *The Witcher* series, concentrating once again on the story of the enigmatic Geralt. This time his primary quest is to understand and stop a rampaging army from destroying his homeland

With a greater world comes greater expectation…

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Xbox One, PlayStation 4, PC
Origin: Poland
Publisher: Bandai Namco Games
Developer: CD Projekt RED
Release: 19 May
Players: 1

Developer Profile

CD Projekt RED shot to fame in 2007 with *The Witcher*, a PC-only RPG based on the fantasy novels of Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski. Presently, *The Witcher* titles make up the entirety of its catalogue – although they are currently working on *Cyberpunk 2077*, an RPG set in a dystopian future.

Developer History

The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings
2011 [PC, Xbox 360]
The Witcher
2007 [PC]

High Point

While *The Witcher 2* expanded on many of the ideas seen in the original, it's the first *Witcher*'s incredibly complex decision-making system that stands out as the developer's crowning achievement thus far.

CD Projekt RED is intent on providing an experience that dwarfs what it's done before in almost every area. From narrative devices to environmental scale, from release platforms to enemy behaviour, 'expansion' seems to be very much the order of the day for *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. Not content with simply continuing with the winning formula that it conceived and built upon across the first two games, this developer is stepping its game up.

Read enough videogame marketing material and advertisements and you'll be well-versed in the hyperbole that tends to categorise each and every television spot and billboard. 'Epic scale', 'adaptive storytelling', 'asynchronous multiplayer progression across multiple devices'… to name but a few. Thankfully, then, when we sit down to talk to level designer Miles Tost about the expanded nature of this third game, he is calm and unassuming – almost like Geralt himself, although without the usual accompaniment of blood and gore. There's not a marketing slogan in earshot.

Tost has no desire to claim that miracles have been performed with *The Witcher 3*. Instead, he's keen to explain just how much work has gone into getting the game to a point where his studio is happy for journalists to play it with a chaperone. Far from everything falling neatly into place, designing and creating a open-world environment has been tough.

"It has certainly been a big learning experience, that's for sure," confides Tost. "Bringing this series into a full open-world setting has always been the ultimate goal, though – that's what the studio has always wanted… but previously the team has been hindered by available technology or budget.

"There has been a lot of experimentation to get to the point we're at now with *The Witcher 3*… obviously, we didn't just show up on day one of development and nail the entire thing right away. It was a constant process of iteration and trying new things, but I think we've now come to a point where we've achieved a really good balance and we're where we want to be."

One of the concerns raised following the announcement that *The Witcher 3* would be embracing an open-world setting was that existing players would yearn for a return to the successes of previous games, while newcomers would be overwhelmed by the sheer scale of what's potentially on offer. While such notions are inherently patronising to all concerned, these are the kinds of issues that must be addressed by a studio looking to alter the foundations of a beloved franchise.

/// As a means of gently guiding you into the world, and the characters and lore that give it its personality, a prologue area has been constructed to allow you to grasp core concepts before moving into more dangerous regions. While it's certainly possible to die here – particularly if you're playing on anything above 'normal' difficulty – the challenge is muted in comparison to what *Witcher* veterans will be used to.

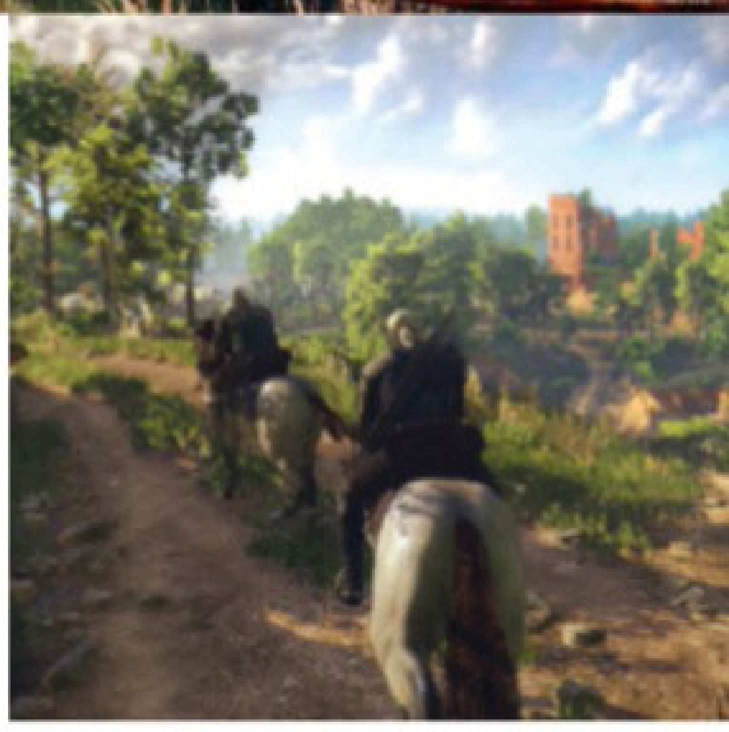
Tumbling green hills, sloppy swamps and chaotically designed villages dot the area; your overarching objective being to slaughter a griffin that has been terrorising the populace. It's here that you're introduced to the core principles of exploring the environment and interrogating its residents for information on monsters, tracking the beasts and eventually dispatching them. Perhaps more importantly, however, certainly for returning *Witcher* players, is just how well this prologue zone communicates what's possible when guiding Geralt through an open-world. There are numerous side-quests to embark upon, secrets to find and routes to explore. In short: it doesn't feel like a prologue, introduction, tutorial or whatever other term you prefer.

"We don't want to build an open-world game, and then withhold that entire open world at the start just because you're a 'beginner', or because past *Witcher* games haven't been open world," Tost explains. "The open world is really good at serving our goal of teaching players the ways of the game and encouraging them to engage with it. You're encouraged from the start to venture away from the obvious routes and see for yourself what is happening away from the main quests."

Truthfully, the early interactions outside of those main quests feel somewhat shallow and predictable – based around helping wounded or stranded travellers, learning pub games and searching for collectibles dotted around the region.







Above: Not all monsters are happy about being hunted, and not all of them are prepared to stand and take part in a fair fight. From the looks of things, we'll be enjoying a wide range of monsters to track, hunt, and slaughter. For the good of the people, obviously.
Right: Your horse allows you to traverse the larger world more easily and quickly, whether you stick to pre-defined trails or set out across country. Once areas have been visited, however, a fast travel option does become available.

Interestingly, when this is put to Tost he explains that it has been done by design – the goal at this early point of the game being to set the scene rather than delve into the finer points of the narrative. As such, side-quests that feed into, and are informed by, the bigger events told through main quests are left for after you've cut your teeth playing the prologue.

/// It's not just through the side-quests that this wider picture is painted, either, as Tost explains: "For example, people might spit at you in the streets for being a Witcher. You might be a very skilled monster hunter, but you're different from normal people and therefore you're feared. As a result, not everyone is happy about your presence in their town or village.

"You're an outcast that performs an important service, but you're only tolerated because you have to be tolerated. Painting that kind of picture is incredibly important in making you feel involved and it gets you closer to the role you're playing as Geralt." Only, it's not exclusively Geralt that you'll be playing as this time around. While we didn't witness it firsthand, there are moments when you will be taking command of Elven swordfighter Ciri. *The Witcher 3*'s titular Wild Hunt group are not only interested in conquering the entire world, they're mysteriously eager to get their hands on Ciri in particular. It's up to you to find her before they do.

> "We treat the prologue area as an introduction area of sorts, designed to introduce to the gameplay mechanics"
> MILES TOST CD PROJEKT RED

At times you'll be given information on her past whereabouts and actions, portrayed firsthand through sequences in which you play as Ciri. These are promised to be more linear than playing Geralt in the 'main game', however, so don't expect to be able to abandon the narrative and set off on optional quests and bouts of exploration as an Elf.

"These [Ciri] moments are a narrative tool that we use to communicate the story and characters," Tost tells us, "rather than being another way of exploring the world. I don't want to go into too much detail about these moments and what they consist of, though, because I'm at risk of ruining the story and how we're telling the story.

"Ultimately, we're following the lead of the books when it comes to Ciri. The relationship [Geralt and Ciri] have in the books is similar to a father-daughter type of thing and that's all I really want to say about her involvement."

/// Whatever the nuances of Ciri's appearances, her presence is most certainly going to play a major role on the wider narrative tone achieved here. Previous games have locked our vision through the eyes of Geralt, everything we've experienced having been filtered through our understanding of the world by playing as a Witcher. By swapping out that narrative filter and replacing it with a Ciri-centric one, CD Projekt RED is putting great faith in its ability to provide multiple viewpoints without undermining or weakening its most famous son. Achieving a consistent narrative quality of the kind we've become used to from the Polish studio, while simultaneously providing another character in a way that doesn't feel superficial or exploitative, is going to be no easy task.

Difficultly of execution is no reason not to try, of course, and it's reassuring to see a studio push the boundaries of story-telling in line with the ever-moving boundary presented by technology. Whatever the case, Tost is eager to reinforce the idea that he and his colleagues are still dedicated to honouring the memory of the novels upon which the series is based. Whatever narrative yarn is concocted, and however it's presented, the games' writing team is not interested in reimagining the world of the books.

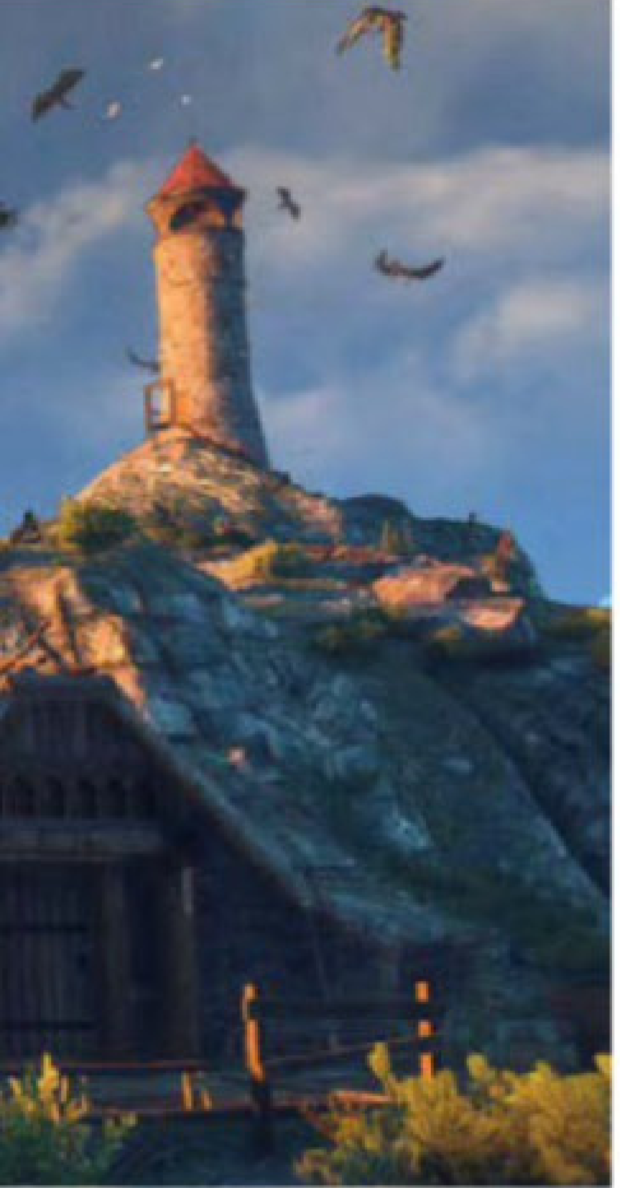
"The *Witcher* games take place after the ending seen in the books, so the stories we're telling here and in past games are our own… but they are heavily based on the source material," Tost says. "However, I think we've become much better at conveying to our players some of the back story and histories of the books. Even if you've not read the books, I think *The Witcher 3* is where we've done our best job at making players comfortable and knowledgeable about events that have happened before the start of the game."

With so much history having come prior to *The Witcher 3*, in the form of novels and games, one of the biggest challenges here is going to be making sure that newcomers are not left feeling lost and missing context. Much effort has gone into the expansion of ideas, but more important than simply an increase in scale is how these new elements ultimately work to more readily envelop you in the narrative and the act of playing as Geralt.

We'll not know to what extent CD Projekt RED has achieved this difficult task until the credits role, but with such a dedication to both the source material and to exploring new story-telling ideas we've every faith that the new gameplay components are not going to undermine the narrative. *The Witcher* has always been about being Geralt, and that core ideal seems to be very much intact.



Above: Investigating scenes of carnage is one way to track any larger monsters that you might have been commissioned to put out of action.









SAY GOODBYE TO 'SCALING'

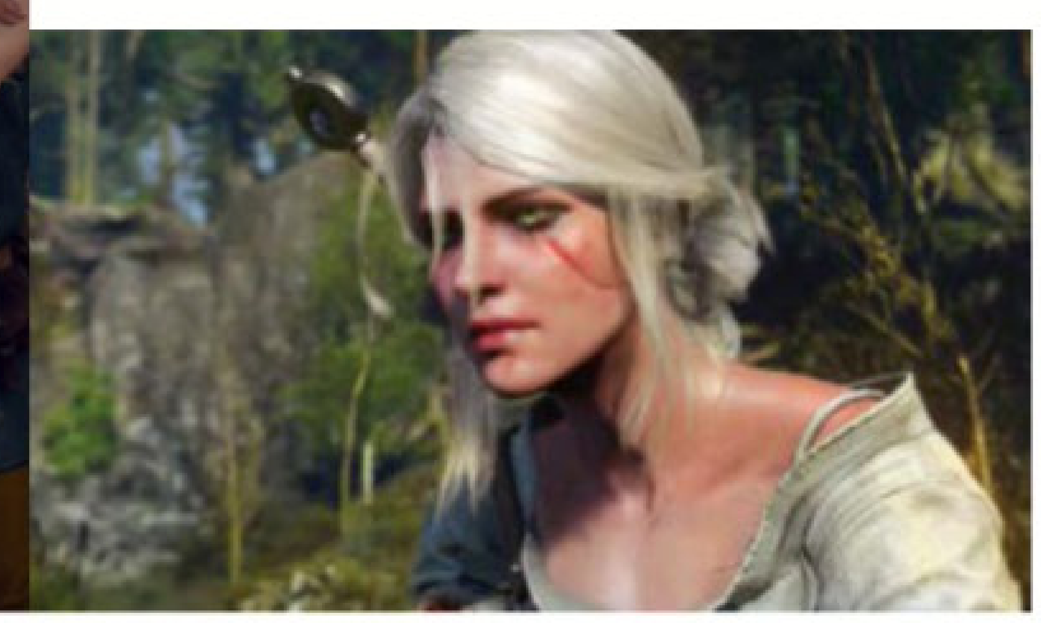
ENEMY SCALING has been abolished in *The Witcher 3*. If you come across an area of the map playing host to a gang of level three wolves, they will always be level three wolves, the goal being to provide a sharper sense of progression and increased skill. CD Projekt RED argues that there's no sense of achievement when enemies scale as you do, as that legendary skill you've mastered doesn't feel so legendary when you're killed by a wolf of the same type you managed to slaughter at the very start of the game.

One of the joys of an open-world game is in returning and re-exploring areas you've been to in the past, and without tougher enemies to battle there must be other tasks generated and provided to keep us satisfied.





Left: Larger settlements promise a greater density of population than *The Witcher* has ever provided, along with a more diverse range of residents. . Below: For the first time in a *Witcher* game you'll have the chance to play as someone other than Geralt. The moments playing as Elfen swordswoman Ciri promise a more linear narrative experience, the goal being to focus events through a different set of eyes rather than to take the focus away from Geralt.





BECOMING CIRI

PLAYING AS CIRI promises to offer a very different tone to that of being Geralt. We asked Miles Tost to shed more light on what such moments will offer: "Perhaps there has been some confusion as to how playing as Ciri works: it happens in the form of flashbacks where you get to see certain information. One of the things that Geralt is doing in the game is searching for Ciri and along the way you'll receive information about where she might be and what she might be doing. Some of this info might be told in a form that allows you to play directly as Ciri and, yeah, at such times the tone is that bit different because you're seeing the world from a whole new perspective. You're seeing things as Ciri interprets it."



▪ Above: Once you start getting a number of cars on the track it can get pretty crazy. *Project Cars* handles its competition fiercely with every driver fighting for their place in the race.





▪ Above: Low-light is definitely the best time of day to race in. The setting sun just seems to get all the best reflections and shadows from the game's textures.

Project Cars

CONCEPT ▪ The purest of racing simulation experiences, funded by the community, developed with their feedback and now looking to wow the masses with its packed feature list

Driven by the details, powered by racing fans

Our biggest concern with *Project Cars*, despite it not being financed by a big publisher, was that it would feel like a game made by committee. Having sought funding from the sim-racing community, seeking feedback and even using many fans as QA testers for the game, it could have ended up as something generic. Thankfully, that's not the issue we encountered as we played this near-final build of the game. What it does have is a laundry list of impressive features, though it remains to be seen whether they will bind together as a package. It's not generic, but it may not yet have any real character behind its wide range of eye-catching features.

One of the game's most impressive elements so far are its visuals, which we've all been gawping over for the last few months. It's a great looking game most of the time. Some urban settings had a tendency to look a little flat the midday sun, but begin to switch on the weather effects or just change the time of day you're racing and *Project Cars* comes alive.

It's a stunning racer when you start to implement its array of sliders. The dynamic weather and time of day in particular are a lot of fun once you start speeding up their turnover. Having four different weather systems swing through every other lap is insane, but quite a thrill as you move from fog to sun to thunderstorms every few minutes. Because of this, we have to put those times it didn't quite look as good down to a few odd areas of lighting.

While still on the subject of looks, we should mention the game's excellent range of viewing options. Both the in-helmet and in-car views are worth praising. You can catch the edges of the padding inside the headwear, and the sound effects are slightly muffled through all that foam and fibreglass. We found ourselves switching through many of the views and enjoyed most if not all of them for one reason or another. They're exceptionally well done and it's testament to the kind of attention to detail inherent in *Project Cars* that each view has clearly been tested, tweaked and refined to perfection.

> "The change in release date allows the game the greatest chance of success and visibility, and the opportunity to polish even further"
> IAN BELL, SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS

/// Perfection is demanded of you as a player, too. This is a really demanding game with





SOUNDS LIKE A WINNER

ONE OF THE really standout features of *Project Cars*, among a long list of superbly crafted additions, is the use of sound in the game. While our finely trained ears may not be attuned to the subtle differences between the many cars and engines featured in the game, we're talking more about how the sound changes depending on your car view. For instance, the cockpit perspective sounds very different to when you have the camera hovering behind the car, and both differ from the bonnet cam. Our favourite though was the in-helmet view, which adds a muffled effect to all the sounds of the track, from the roar of the engine to rain hitting the windshield.

INFORMATION

Details

Format:
PS4, Xbox One, PC
Origin:
UK
Publisher:
Bandai Namco
Developer:
Slightly Mad Studios
Release:
20 March
Players:
1-TBC

Developer Profile

The London-based studio has been deep in the racing genre since it was formed in 2008. With former SimBin founder Ian Bell as studio head, this is a team with plenty of expertise from the *GTR* series, and it leapt into the limelight with *Need For Speed: Shift.*

Developer History

Need For Speed: Shift
2009 [Multi]
Shift 2: Unleashed
2011 [Multi]
World Of Speed
2014 [PC]

High Point

Managing to get this entire game made without the support of a publisher is pretty much the biggest thing that Slightly Mad has achieved. The racing gamer community has been pivotal in getting it off the ground.

very tricky handling. There's no concession to the casual fan like you might have had with, say, *Forza Motorsport 5*. You either play by the game's rules or you spin off the track straight into a wall. It can take a while to get used to. In this respect, *Project Cars* feels like a game that's going to need a racing wheel to really enjoy. Playing with a pad could well be holding you back in terms of sensitivity.

Finally, the open nature of how you explore and improve through single-player is a refreshing change. Take the wheel of any car you like. Prove yourself as a driver first and foremost and worry about everything else later. The lack of traditional structure puts the onus on self-motivation though. You're going to have to really want to play this game to keep on going, because it's certainly not going to lay out rewards or incentives to keep you coming back, beyond your will to keep competing and proving yourself, that is.

This is a game packed with detail, from the car models to the weather systems. The handling is subtle and demanding. The lighting is gorgeous and often breathtakingly rendered. The openness of the solo campaign is impressive. What it felt like it was lacking at times though was a sense of personality. There's heart here – the passion of the team seeps through every pore of this game – but we don't yet feel it coming together as an immersive experience. It's not helped by a menu system that is currently rather bare and impenetrable. In fact, the user interface on the whole is a little behind other aspects of the game, but since we're still only experiencing a slice and without the online side of things to drive competition, that's a concern we're happy to leave to one side for now. Hopefully the remaining weeks will see some flair added to *Project Cars'* promising package.



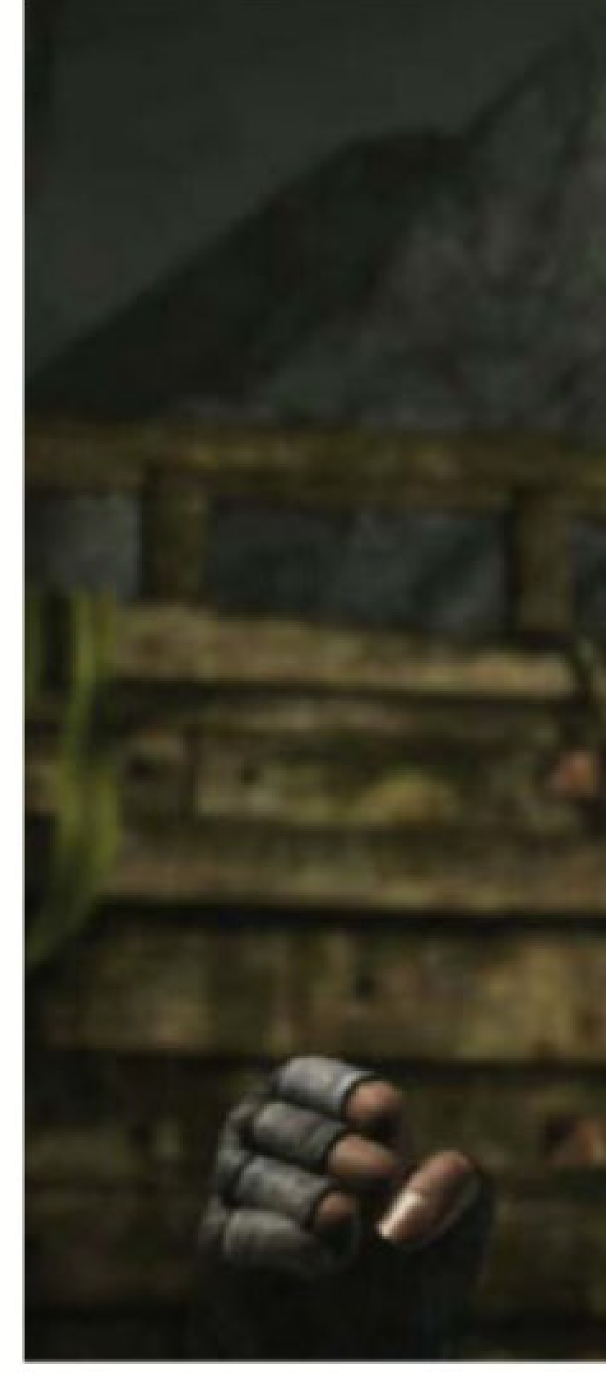
Above: Get a good downpour going and *Project Cars* takes on a new life somehow. The handling shifts of course, but more than that the whole atmosphere of the game changes. Driving around in a thunderstorm is just inherently more exciting.





1





2



Mortal Kombat X

CONCEPT ■ A couple of years after the events of *Mortal Kombat* (2011), Sub-Zero and Scorpion return with a new generation of bloodthirsty fighters

Get over here

Reptile goes invisible, dodges a razor-sharp hat (don't ask) thrown by Kung Lao and spews corrosive acid onto his adversary's head. Kung Lao stumbles back, and Reptile doesn't waste a second: he jumps forward, grabs the monk's jaw and breaks it. Then he grabs Lao's eyes, forcing his thumbs into the sockets as they pop with a sickening squelch. Inexplicably, Lao isn't dead, so Reptile throws acid onto his face and rips his skull open like a coconut. Don't let that gratuitously violent intro fool you: *Mortal Kombat X* is actually a very technical game, and making Reptile into the killing machine depicted above took some practice.

This isn't the rock-paper-scissors gameplay of old-school *Mortal Kombat*. After training itself up with *Injustice: Gods Among Us*, NetherRealm is ready to go head-to-head with the professional fighters. We spoke to the studio's marketing game manager Brian Goodman about what we can expect from their latest game.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Multi
Origin: USA
Publisher: Warner Bros.
Developer: NetherRealm
Genre: Fighting
Release: 14 April
Players: 1-2

Developer Profile

NetherRealm was formed in 2009 in the wake of the collapse of Midway Games. The studio is still headed by long-time *Mortal Kombat* project lead Ed Boon, after the departure of founding partner John Tobias to Zynga. The company's titles are more or less the reason we have an internal ratings board in gaming.

Developer History

Mortal Kombat **2011 [PS3, Vita, Xbox 360, PC]**
Batman: Arkham City Lockdown **2011 [Android, iOS]**
Injustice: Gods Among Us **2013 [PS3, PS4, Vita, Wii U, PC, Xbox 360]**

High Point

Mortal Kombat's rollercoaster quality peaked with 2011's rebooted timeline. It had all the fan-favourite characters, new X-Ray moves and Reptile made a return, so we were happy enough.

1 IT'S EASY FOR NEW PLAYERS TO GET INTO…

"WE'RE ALL ABOUT creating features that appeal to new gamers. In the last few games, we've really taken steps to supply more single-player content – it's an easy road into the game, it's more forgiving, and you don't have to be incredibly skilled at the game to get a lot of enjoyment out of it. We've always tried to make the game as accessible as possible whilst still delivering a very deep and technical, core fighting game. But our [development ethic] has a dual focus: of making sure we're taking care of casual fans as much as we're taking care of players that aren't used to the franchise. That's the hardest part about working on the game - getting new people interested."







"We want the presentation to be big and movie-like – we just want you to think you're playing a movie"

BRIAN GOODMAN, NETHERREALM

2 ...BUT THERE'S ENOUGH DEPTH THERE FOR VETERANS

"...BUT WE'RE taking care of our core, too, and our core *are* the proper fighters. There are definitely some characters that we feel only some of the real hardcore fighters are really going to master. One of Kung Lao's variations, for example, is a very *very* tricky fighter that uses his hat as a trap... similar with Raiden, where the 'Lord Of Storms' version can set up traps to mess with the opponent. It's not like casual players wont be able to use it or anything, but we just think only those guys with a *serious* level of skill can really make those variations go and use them to their maximum potential."

3 ITS VARIATIONS FEATURE PLAYS WITH HOW WE USE CHARACTERS IN FIGHTING GAMES

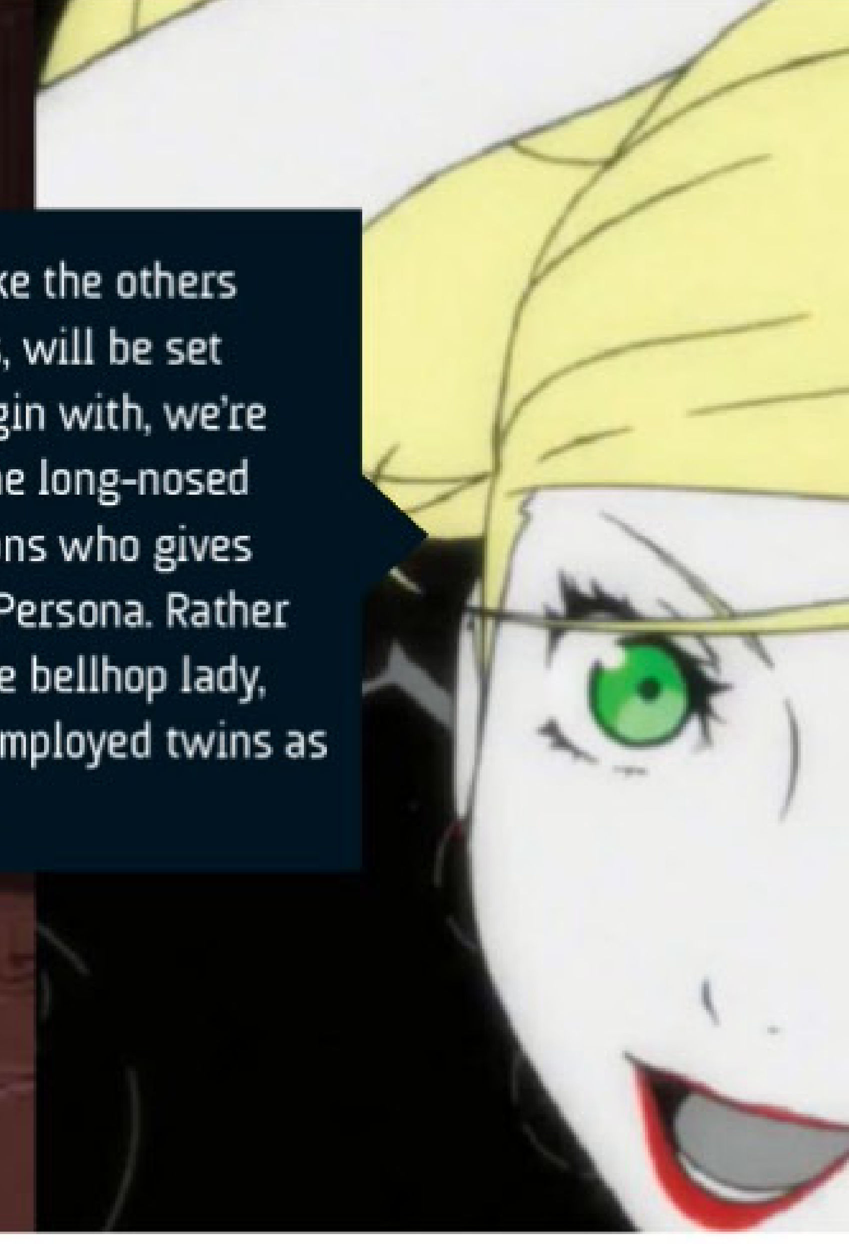
"AT THEIR CORE, we want each character to feel the same. Someone like Ferra & Tor is a bit different because that's a new character and we've yet to establish how it feels in the public's mind. One of the opportunities we have with variations is that you can maintain the core of a character, but really employ a whole new strategy and fight style to them. That's where this feature becomes so important – we can make a character like Ferra & Tor play like more of a zoning character in one variation, but when it's just Tor and Ferra's on the sidelines, you've got to get in real close and keep the pressure up."

4 IT'S BUILT AROUND A CINEMATIC STORY MODE

"I'M NOT SURE why [Story modes] haven't really picked up on it though... Y'know, our Story Mode is a *huge* feature, it's very popular and it allows us to create within a space we're comfortable with. Even with *Injustice* and its fighting mechanics and such, we aim to be cinematic in everything we do. We want the presentation to be big and movie-like – we just want you to think you're playing a movie. The Story stuff comes naturally to us. *Injustice* was a great experiment for us in terms of learning how to serve our fans, and provide a ton of content and a ton of opportunities for our players to enjoy the game in a variety of different ways."

5 DESPITE THE NEW MECHANICS, IT'S STILL MORTAL KOMBAT

"WE ALWAYS WANT *Mortal Kombat* to feel like *Mortal Kombat* and I think we've achieved that in how the game plays and feels. But at the same time, we're trying to innovate and we're trying to do something new. People get tired of the same characters and the same gameplay. New characters are a great way to keep things fresh, and we also took the Story Mode and fast-forwarded that a few years to bring this new generation of fighters in. From a creative standpoint, that's really fun because you can explore how these new fighters get to communicate with the 'old guard' and what they represent."

1 The game, like the others in the series, will be set in Japan. To begin with, we're shown Igor – the long-nosed master of demons who gives power to your Persona. Rather than one blonde bellhop lady, this time he's employed twins as his attendants.

Persona 5

CONCEPT ■ Strange powers grant a group of youths the ability to call upon their individual and personalised id to fight for them... with spectacular results

Cat got your tongue?

This isn't your standard, bread-and-butter RPG. No, this is much better. This is slicker and cooler and more colourful and more intense. This is about being a kid, rebelling against modernity's dreary routines. This is about subversion, stealing – sticking up a long stylish finger to 'the man'. This is *Persona 5*, and it's fascinating. If you've not discovered this series yet, you need to get on this.

Following on from *Persona 4 Golden*'s impactful critical and commercial Western release, Atlus' in-house P-2 Studio has been hard at work, deconstructing what made its biggest hit work, and what didn't. The result is the sharpest, coolest game to come out of Japan in years – a true shot of life into the arm of the JRPG. We might have *Final Fantasy XV* giving the genre a Nolan-esque gritty reboot, but *Persona* continues to take the genre in its original direction, and doing it seemingly without effort. Here's what we've learnt from the game via its debut trailer...



INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4, PS3
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Atlus
Developer: P-Studio 2
Release: TBC 2015
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Atlus has been around for a while, making waves in the RPG genre with the company's core IP, *Shin Megami Tensei*. Since then, the studio has experimented with the likes of *Catherine* and *Persona*, branching out into other subgenres and always pulling each target genre off with style and verve.

Developer History

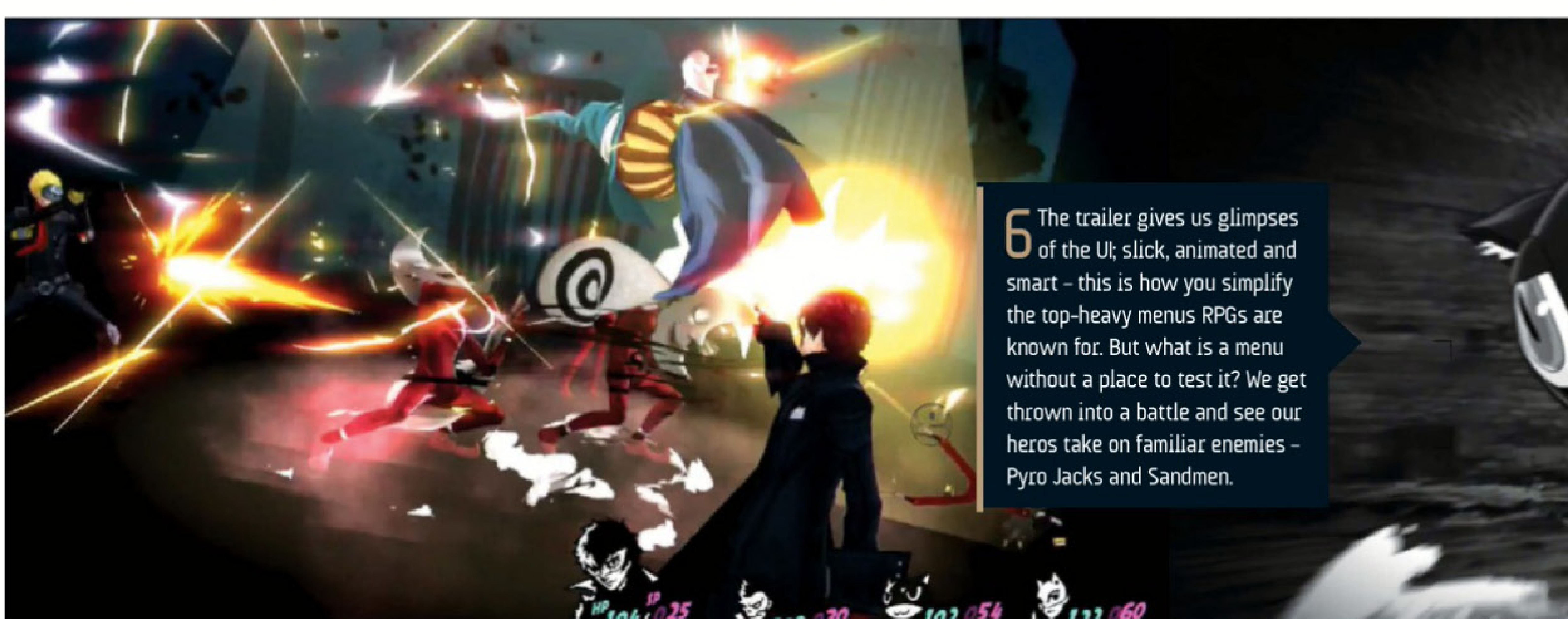
Revelations: Persona **1996 [PSOne]**
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner: Soul Hackers **1997 [Sega Saturn]**
Shin Megami Tensei: Lucifer's Call **2003 [PS2]**
Catherine **2011 [PS3, 360]**

High Point

Lucifer's Call was unlike any other JRPG we've ever played - the battle system was basically *Pokémon* for adults, whilst the mission structure and world design was intentionally myopic, messing with the order you played. It was unique on release, and still is today.




4 Doesn't this bar look *exactly* like the one from Atlus' sadistic puzzler, *Catherine*? We think it might mean the broader Atlus world is finally going to show some interconnectivity. Outside of that, we've learnt the team is actually a group of heist-pulling thieves. Excellent news.

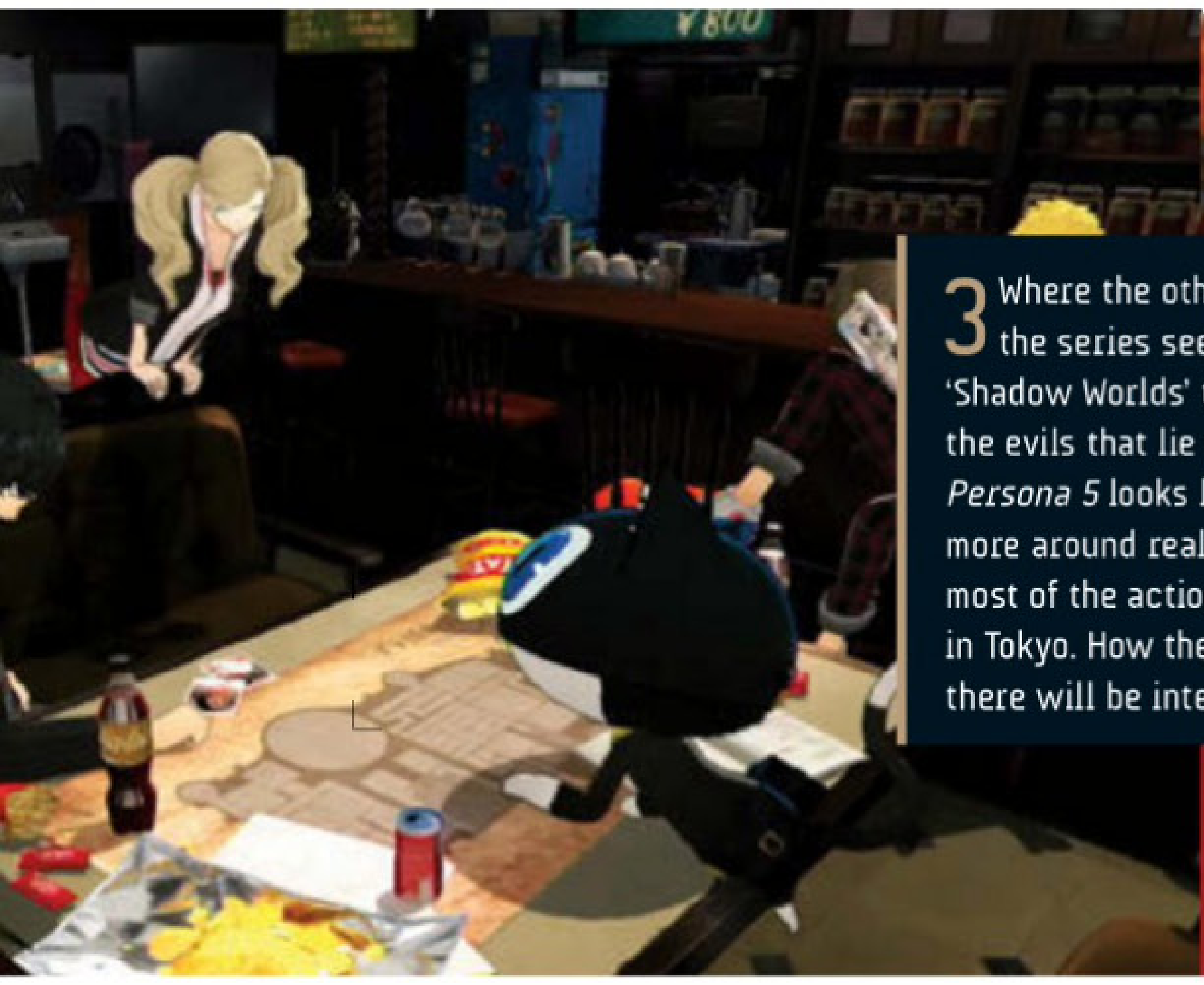


6 The trailer gives us glimpses of the UI; slick, animated and smart – this is how you simplify the top-heavy menus RPGs are known for. But what is a menu without a place to test it? We get thrown into a battle and see our heros take on familiar enemies – Pyro Jacks and Sandmen.



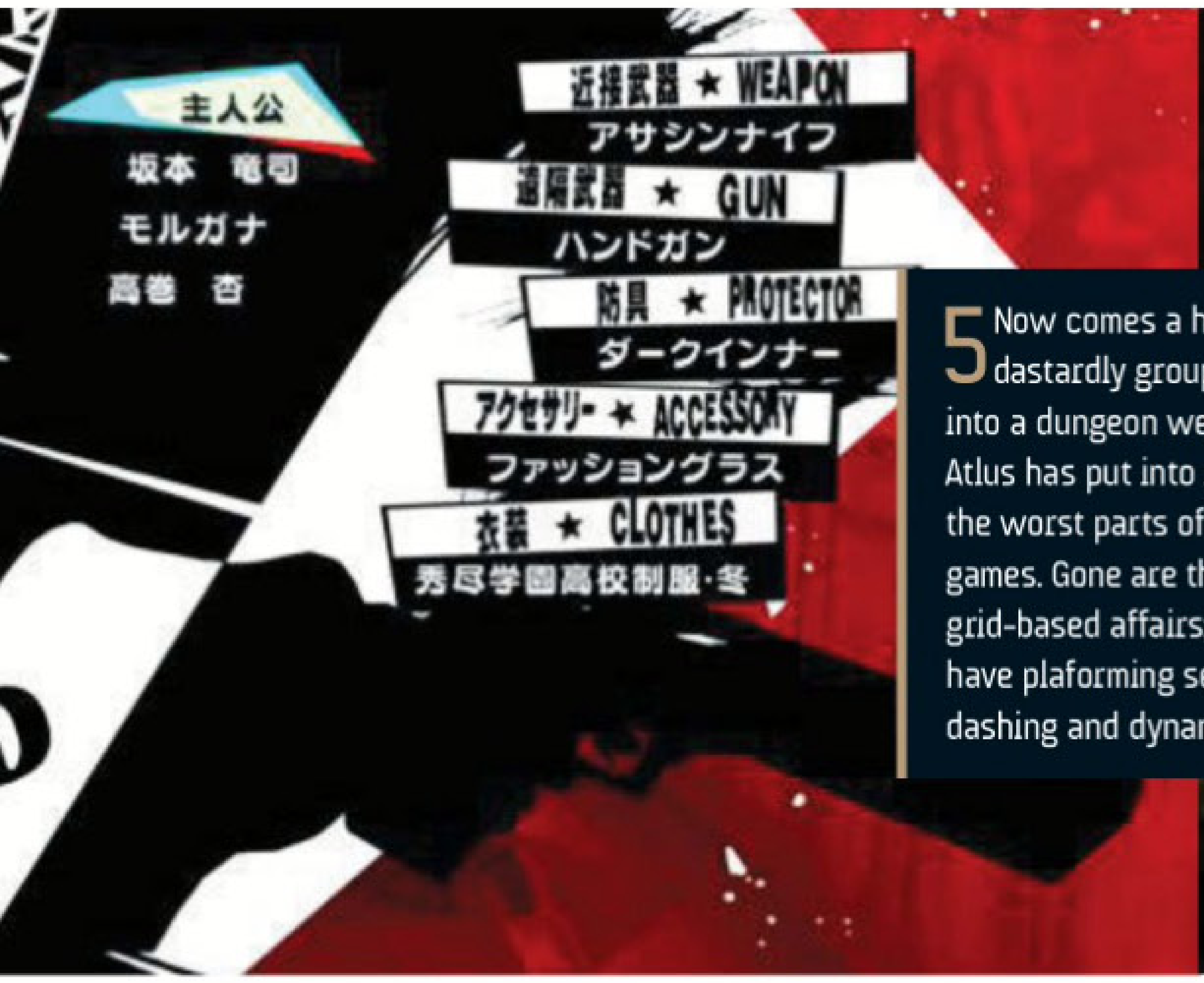


2 After being introduced to our cast – the nameless androgynous protagonist, a girl with bunches, a guy that looks like Naruto and a cat (!) – we're shown the group in school. So the day-to-day social navigation returns. Our protagonist seems more rebellious than we've seen so far.



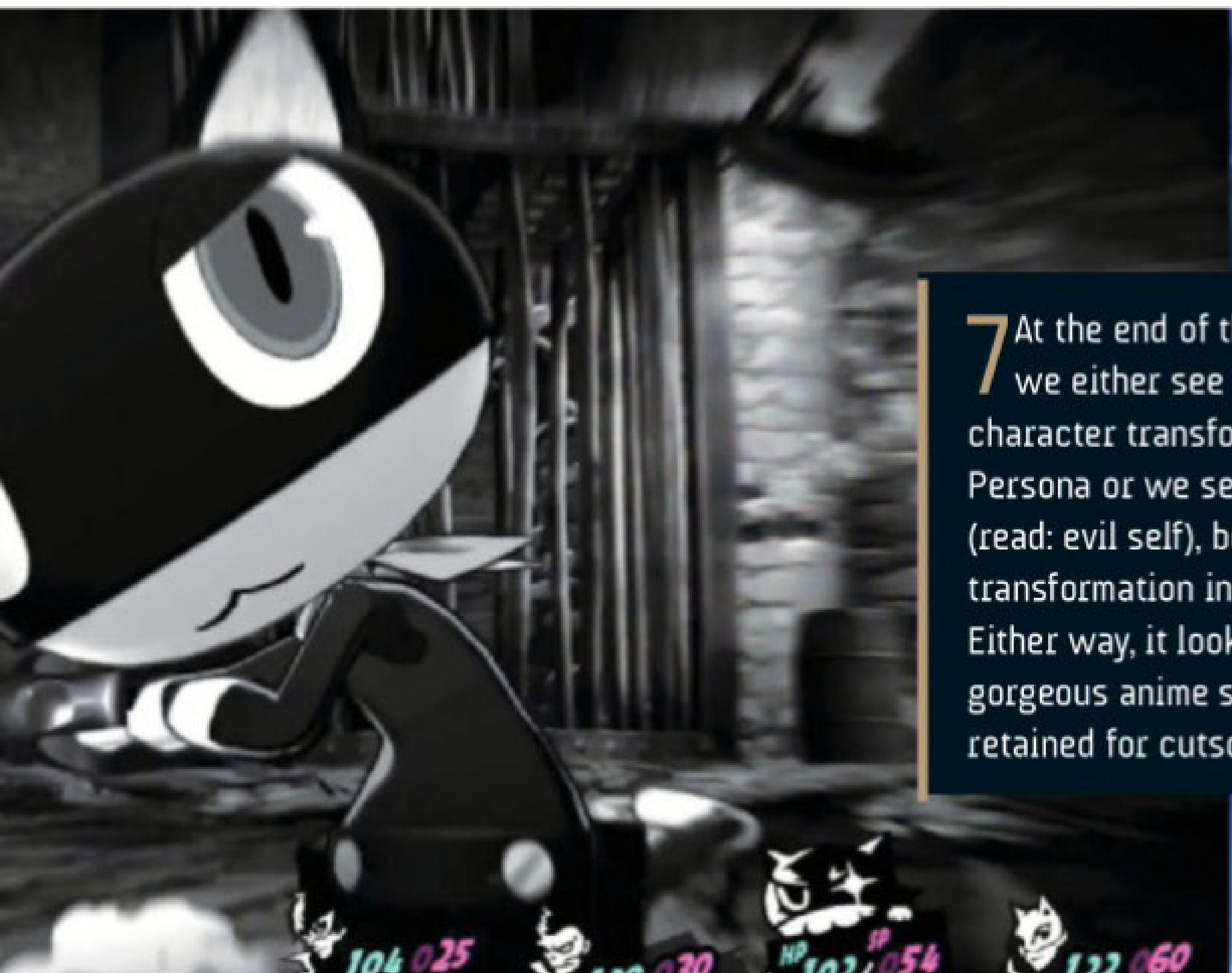


3 Where the other games in the series see you visiting 'Shadow Worlds' to confront the evils that lie within them, *Persona 5* looks like it centres more around reality – it seems most of the action takes place in Tokyo. How the demons get there will be interesting…





5 Now comes a heist – after the dastardly group of kids jump into a dungeon we see the effort Atlus has put into redesigning the worst parts of the past games. Gone are the boring old grid-based affairs; now we have plaforming sections, cover-dashing and dynamic landscapes.

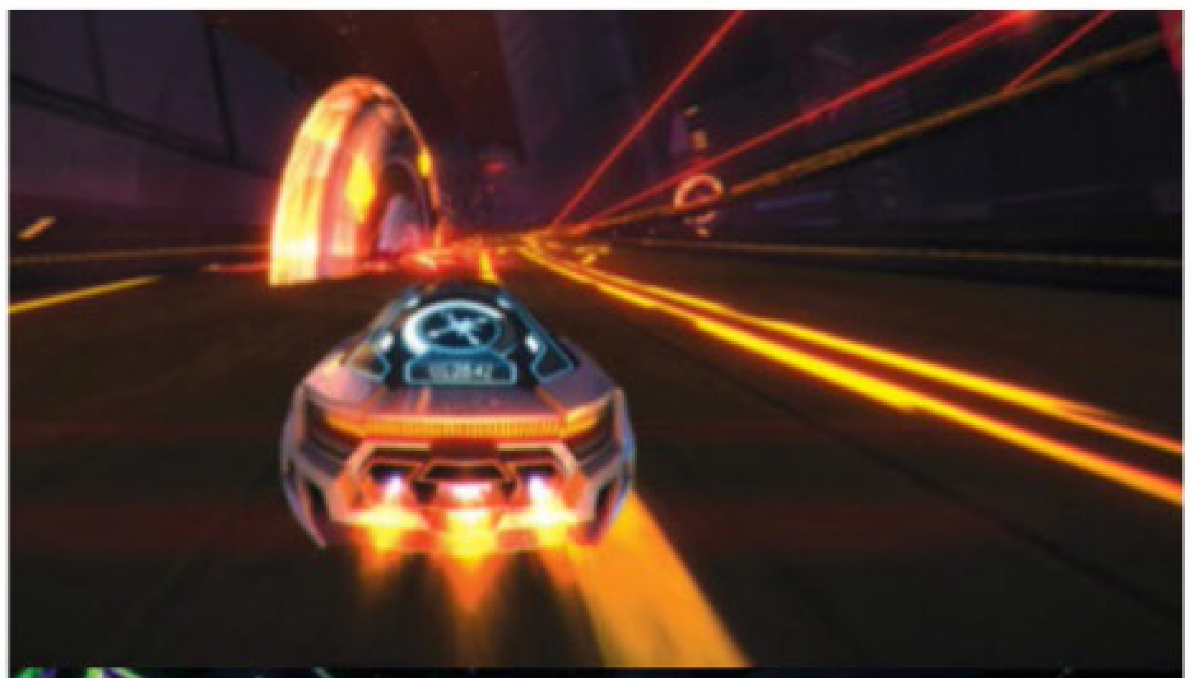




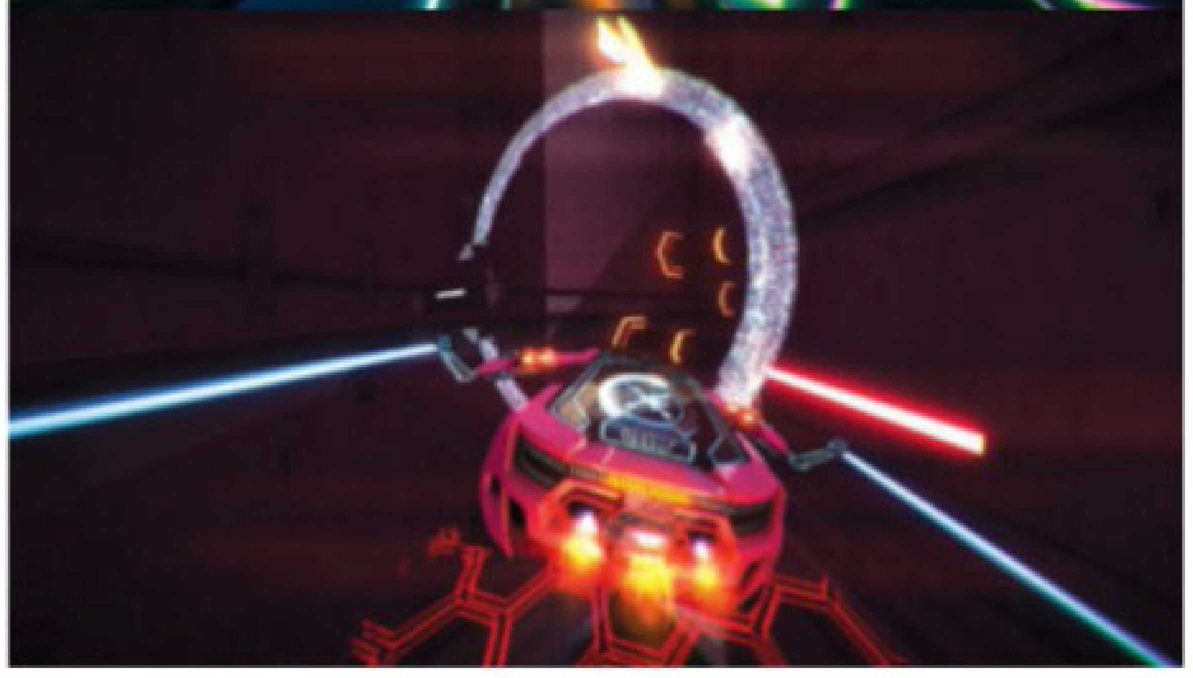
7 At the end of the trailer, we either see our main character transform into his Persona or we see his Shadow (read: evil self), begin his transformation into a boss. Either way, it looks great – the gorgeous anime style has been retained for cutscenes.



■ Left: Much like *Split/Second*, all the info you need about your race is on the car itself, not in the corners of the screen, so you can enjoy the full glory of this neon nightmare before you. Below: Some of the lighting effects when you pass by objects or get odd in-world glitches are really quite excellent. Impressive work from such a small team.







Distance

CONCEPT ■ Neon-lit survival action racing where the challenge is keeping on the track, not necessarily beating your opponents and setting the fastest time

Trapped in a glorious Tron nightmare

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC, PS4
Origin: USA
Publisher: Refract Studios
Developer: In-house
Release: TBC 2015
Players: 1-TBC

Developer Profile

Brought together by projects at DigiPen, Refract is a young and relatively inexperienced team, but with so many of their school projects being released for public consumption, they already have plenty to build on. *Distance* is Refract's first full game release and was funded via Kickstarter in late 2012.

Developer History

Nitronic Rush
2012 [PC]
The Fourth Wall
2012 [PC]
Solace
2010 [PC]

High Point

Distance is a spiritual successor to *Nitronic Rush*, a DigiPen project this team created that won the Indie Game Challenge Gamer's Choice award in 2012.

In what feels like an ingenious combination of *Split/Second*, *Rez* and *Portal*, *Distance* brings a neon-lit world with a dark underbelly to the action racing circuit. The speeds can be intense, the tricks insane, the paths brain-bending and even though this is the first full game from Refract Studios, it is already looking packed full of content.

But before we get too caught up in all of that, we should focus on the action on the track. As we got to grips with the limited Arcade mode of this Early Access build of the game it at first felt like an on-rails game. The steering didn't seem to be taking us further than the outer edges of the track, more like an *F-Zero* or *WipEout* than a *Need For Speed*. But then things started shifting. First we were introduced to the ability to jump. Then we learnt how to fly for short periods between pieces of track. Next we were essentially gravity hopping from one course to another, spinning the car in mid-air to start on a new stretch of course. Combining all of these moves together, while simultaneously dodging giant buzz saws, laser beams and floating blockades that spear the track to block your path, and you have a pretty frantic form of racing to contend with. Frankly, at this point having to worry about anything as pedestrian as braking would have been too much.

Distance is at its best when all of those gameplay mechanics come together and begin to mesh with the environment and soundtrack. There's a really solid, thumping backbeat to this whole game and once the atmosphere and backdrop of the game begins to match that rhythm with flashes of light and objects, everything really comes together in an enjoyable way. While the lightness of touch in those early moments felt rather remote, once the music got going and the world came alive, it became an incredibly immersive experience.

And that's before we start reeling off the list of features *Distance* is looking to launch with on PC and PS4. Alongside an extended Arcade mode from the one we played there is already online multiplayer, a stunt mode, split-screen multiplayer and a track creator which gives you complete control over all the tools to make insane, gravity bending and warping courses of your own. For a first game out of the park, Refract Studios is delivering a lot of cool features, perhaps helped in part by overachieving on its Kickstarter goals (successfully funded in November 2012) and already having a solid community from its *Nitronic Rush* DigiPen project. We see big things for this game and the Refract team in the future.

> "We're starting fresh with Distance and rethinking almost every aspect of the game. Nitronic Rush was a student project and in many ways only a prototype for what Distance will become"

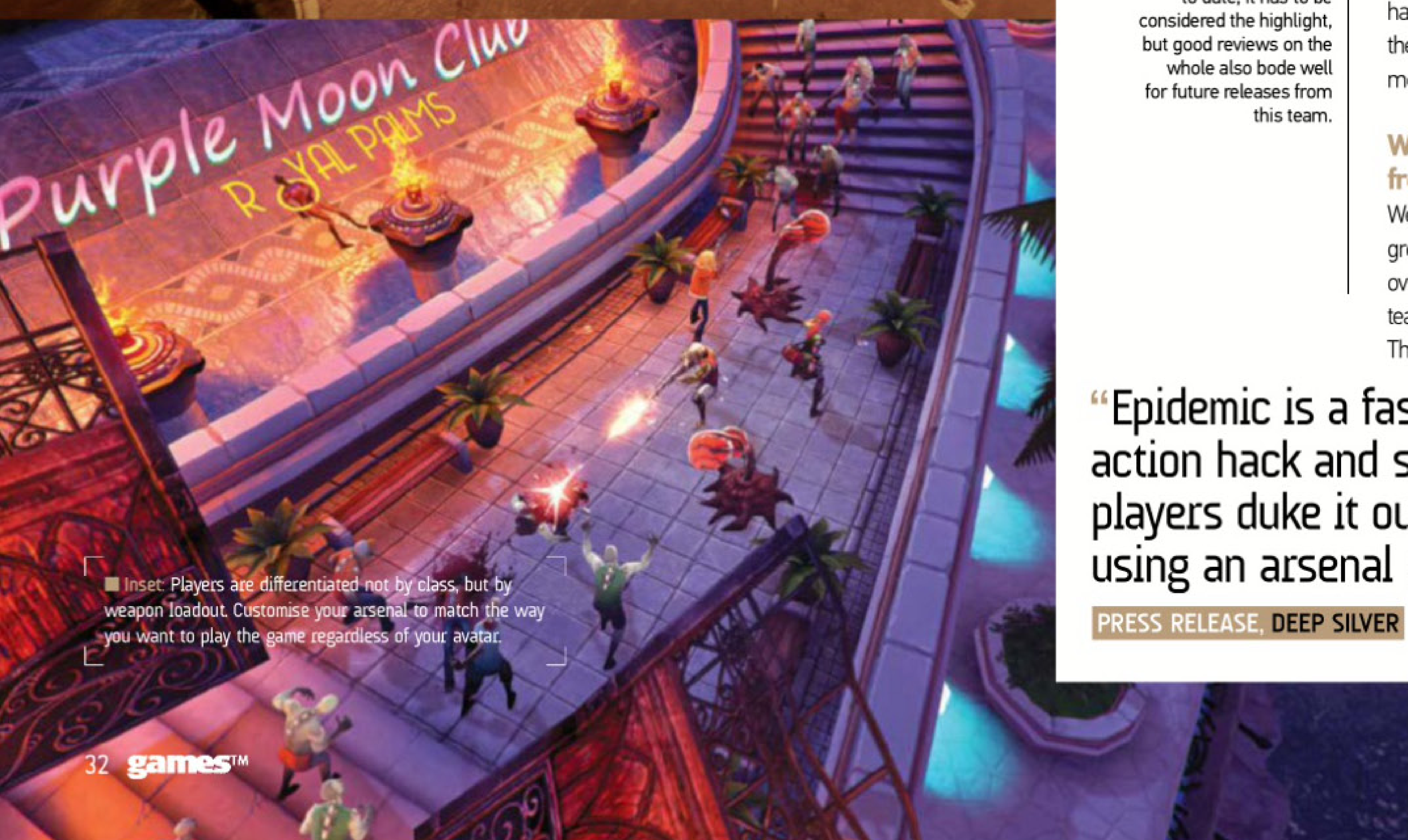
KYLE HOLDWICK REFRACT



■ Inset: While not a MOBA in every way, *Epidemic* still has many of the genre's main trappings, including plenty of enemies for grinding and building up abilities.







■ Inset: Players are differentiated not by class, but by weapon loadout. Customise your arsenal to match the way you want to play the game regardless of your avatar.

Dead Island: Epidemic

CONCEPT ■ The popular franchise turns it sights to the MOBA world with this upcoming release, already available in Steam Early Access

They've called it a 'ZOMBA', but we don't have to

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Stunlock Studios
Release: TBC 2015
Players: 1-12

Developer Profile

Created in 2010, Stunlock only has one completed game to its name thus far, but it was the well-received *Bloodline Champions*, another free-to-play release. Another title named *Project 0* is currently on hold while still in the prototype stage, presumably at least until the release and post launch support for *Epidemic* has been completed.

Developer History

Bloodline Champions
2011 [PC]
Project 0
TBC [PC]

High Point

Since *Bloodline* is the studio's only game to date, it has to be considered the highlight, but good reviews on the whole also bode well for future releases from this team.

How exactly did *Dead Island* become such a big franchise? And how did it become a MOBA? *Epidemic* is now the third spin-off game from the original *Dead Island* and it's a surprising change of gear from the first-person sandbox experiences we've seen so far. We caught up with Matthias Trumpfheller, community manager at Deep Silver to find out what the thinking is behind *Epidemic*, how it's handling microtransactions and whether it plans to get the attention of the pro gamer circuit to compete with *Dota 2* and *LOL*.

The game has been through a fair amount of testing so far. What have you been looking out for and what key things have you learned?

Even though our PvPvPvE mode Scavenger was the main focus from the beginning we quickly realised that our player base was split 50-50 between our PvP and PvE (Horde) mode. Since the development time to create new Horde mode content didn't justify the time players enjoyed the maps for, we decided to fundamentally change the PvE part of the game. We wanted to create a mode that provided high replayability while requiring moderate resources to create new content for it. You have to keep in mind that Stunlock Studios consists of 'only' 24 developers. We came up with Crossroads, which not only offers randomised tiles with randomised events but also scales the difficulty according to your performance and removed the time pressure between events thus creating a more enjoyable experience for everyone. Crossroads had the additional benefit of educating players for the more complex PvP mode by having Scavenger mechanics as isolated events.

Will you be looking to get attention from the pro gamer circuit?

We definitely see a lot of potential there. Our core group is very strong and dedicated and some spent over 1000 hours in the game. It is challenging to teach players how to play Scavenger the right way. There are lots of decisions individuals and the team

> "Epidemic is a fast-paced multiplayer action hack and slash arena where players duke it out over supply points, using an arsenal of crafted weaponry"
>
> PRESS RELEASE, DEEP SILVER

as a whole have to make at any point of time during a match. Do we try to get more flags than the rest of the team and try to defend it? Do we go for the special zombie that yields more supply points but risk getting attacked while fighting it and leaving our flags unprotected? The three-team-dynamic is also something not many games offer and seems to be new to many players: do we split up and risk getting into a 2vs4 or 2vs4vs2 fight? Do we team up with the second team to dethrone the first placed team? The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Temporarily. We are of course listening to the community and we received a lot of feedback stating that a straight team vs team mode might entice competitive play more. We are working on such a mode but it is a lot more work than just removing a couple of flags and one team, but we are getting there.

How are you approaching the thorny subject of microtransactions?

This is a very delicate topic and we are aware of the risks but rest assured, we are all gamers and absolutely hate pay-to-win. Everything that can be bought in our shop is achievable through playing the game, too. In fact, the strongest weapons can only be crafted with the currencies you earn from playing the game.

Will paid-for items give players a noticeable advantage?

The difficulty of a match and the level of the opponents is determined by the weapon level you have. So while you are able to buy a weapon that might be stronger than the one you currently have you automatically fight against equally strong opponents and they might have more experience in the game if they got to that tier without taking the shortcut.

What sort of variety of weapons and gear should we expect from the final game?

Creating more content like additional weapons, modifications, characters etc. is currently the main route. Additional to that, we are constantly thinking of alternative systems that might give the player more choice or make the game more interesting. Just in the last months we added weapon modifications and gadgets and they work out very well – we also removed or streamlined systems that didn't work as intended. That's the beauty of developing a game as a service and being in a beta phase. You keep what works and remove what doesn't work with the help of analysing our data and listing to our players.

So tell us more about customisation.

While we have subtle differences in our classes, our weapons, modifications, and gadgets can be seen as our variation of a talent tree. But contrary to character specific talent trees you are able to form every character in every way you deem fit – do you want to turn your ranged support character into a crit-heavy melee character? Not a problem with the right gear.



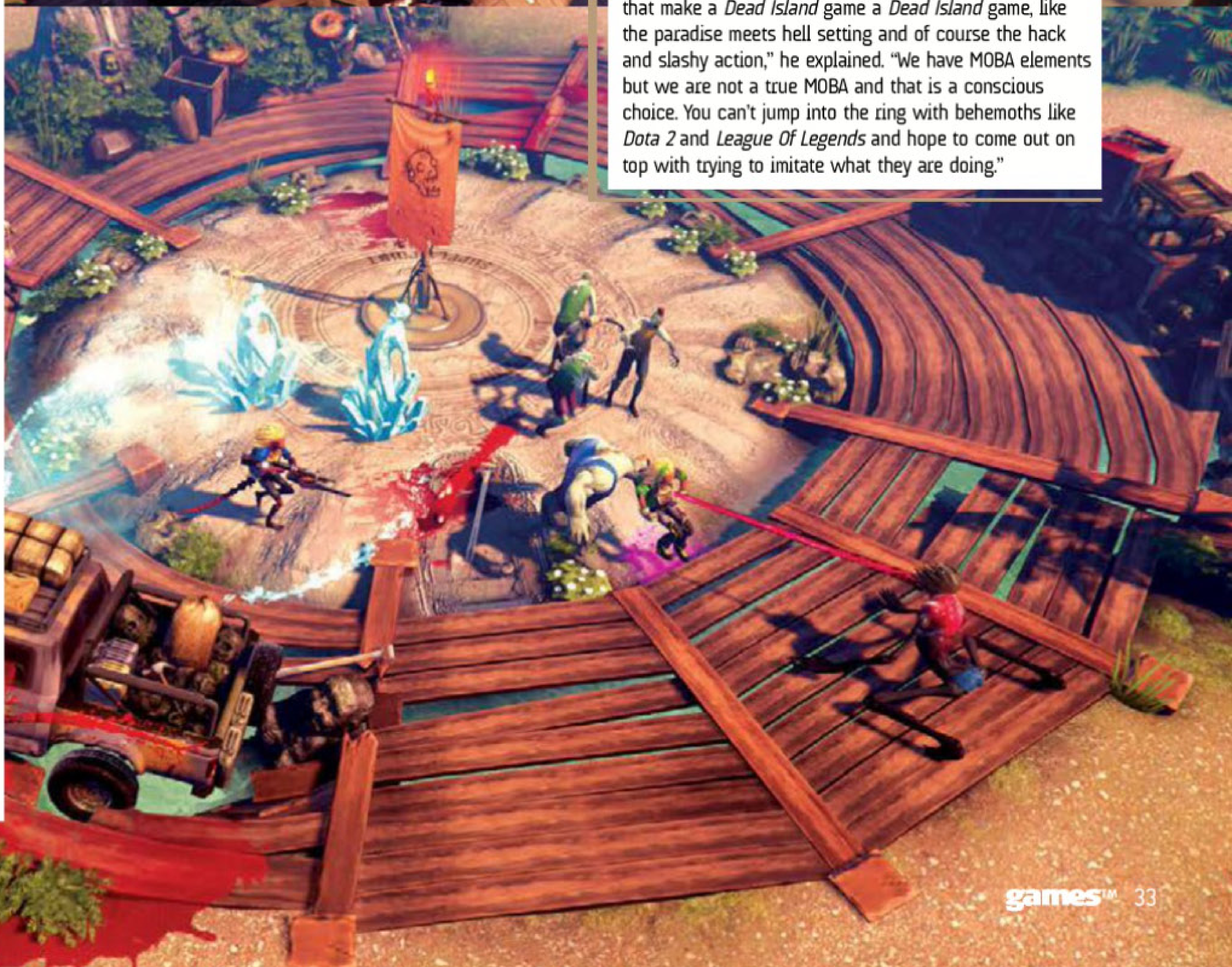
Inset: A PvPvPvE mode involving three teams and a host of enemies looks to be a highlight of the competitive multiplayer experience *Epidemic* is offering. It's not as deep as other arena battlers out there, but it's definitely interesting.



Inset: *Epidemic* leans more towards the frantic, zany fun side of the *Dead Island* coin than the darker, more emotional side that has sometimes been associated with the series.

THE MOBA MASH

DEAD ISLAND: EPIDEMIC isn't going to be competing with the likes of *League Of Legends* and *Dota 2* according to Matthias Trumpfheller. It's looking to set itself apart with a much more action-orientated style. "I believe we did a great job in reflecting the unique combination of elements that make a *Dead Island* game a *Dead Island* game, like the paradise meets hell setting and of course the hack and slashy action," he explained. "We have MOBA elements but we are not a true MOBA and that is a conscious choice. You can't jump into the ring with behemoths like *Dota 2* and *League Of Legends* and hope to come out on top with trying to imitate what they are doing."





Below: If your brain is melting out of your ears because you can't even comprehend how to start solving a puzzle, don't worry – at least you've got some nice scenery to look at





Infinifactory

CONCEPT A complex, voxel-based construction puzzle game, *Infinifactory* is like the more cerebral aspects of *Minecraft*, distilled into a more fruitful gaming experience

A game for anyone that likes improbable learning curves

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC
Origin: USA
Publisher: Zachtronics
Developer: In-house
Release: 2015
Genre: Construction puzzler
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Zachary Barth is largely referred to as 'the guy who influenced *Minecraft*' after he created *Block World* – a procedurally generated, voxel-based game that revolved around deformation and building. Since then, he established Zachtronics and produced the successful *SpaceChem* series.

Developer History

SpaceChem
2011 [PC]
IronClad Tactics
2013 [PC, Mac, Android, PS4]

High Point

SpaceChem is heralded as an incredibly intelligent and catchy game – an educational and interesting experience that is a unique anomaly amongst gaming. *Team Fortress* creator Robin Walker said *SpaceChem* is 'pretty much the best game ever made'

***Infinifactory* is a difficult game.** It's probably harder than *The Talos Principle*, it's definitely trickier than *Puzzle Dimension*, and it's certainly a lot more challenging than *Portal*. But it's a game worth mentioning amongst such esteemed titles, because, in its own way, *Infinifactory* is new. It's doing something that hasn't been done before.

Okay, maybe that's a stretch – it *has* been done before, but only in Zachtronic's other first-person construction puzzler, *Infiniminer*. "I think we're most well-known for our engineering puzzle games," creator Zach Barth tells us as we're sitting at one end of an international video call, clicking around on the Early Access build of *Infinifactory*. "*Infinifactory* builds on the idea [Zachtronics] put out in *Infiniminer*, and for a long while I wanted to build another game with blocks, but I didn't think I could because all I thought was 'Oh some other asshole made a game with blocks' [laughter]."

Barth is of course referring to *Minecraft* – his previous project, *Infiniminer*, is often cited as the first voxel-based mining game, which Notch heavily riffed off to create the pan-global phenomenon that is *Minecraft*. But it's clear Barth is past that now, and we're glad, because *Infinifactory* is much more directed in its aim – there's no aimless wandering here, the world is instead populated with interesting physical puzzles, problems that require lateral thinking to get your head around.

The anti-puzzles Barth and his team have made are bolstered by this weird sci-fi skin – the kind of thing you can just observe as you wonder around. Unsettling.



We're (admittedly) lost; we know we're supposed to get a certain amount of resources from one place to another, but so far all we've succeeded in doing is making a conveyor belt to nowhere. "So our games kinda revolve around building stuff, but they're really open-ended," he explains. He's right – our conveyor belt has just dumped precious resources off a cliff-face. There's very little introduction to the game, but we get the feeling that's intentional: this game is making you work for your rewards.

"In a lot of other puzzle games, you're just working out a path that the developers intended you to work through. Our puzzle games are totally open-ended – like, we say 'Construct a device that does X'. So right now you've got to build a factory, right, that takes these [resources] and allows you to build another thing. That's our special genre."

Zachtronics spent some time making educational games before starting work on *Infinifactory* – games that introduced pretty difficult concepts (Rube Goldberg-esque chemical pathways, for example…) and simplified them as much as possible with game-friendly UX. This logical, problem-solving methodology has clearly influenced how *Infinifactory* has been made. It's cinematic, too, in its own way – with a bizarro alien overlord theme and a setting reminiscent of Texas… it's like someone slammed Jay and Silent Bob into *Portal* and threw in an ounce of *Catherine* for good measure. Which of course is only a good thing.

"In a lot of other puzzle games, you're just working out a path that the developers intended"
ZACHARY BARTH, ZACHTRONICS


MARCH 14TH & 15TH 2015
EXCEL CENTRE LONDON
LONDON Super COMIC CONVENTION
www.londonsupercomicconvention.com
THE UK'S LARGEST COMIC CONVENTION
Win a trip for two to DRAGONCON 2015 in Atlanta with
THE LONDON SUPER COSTUME COMPETITON!
With special guests:
ANNSHELLA, KAMUI COSPLAY, BILL DORAN, NIKITA COSPLAY and YAYA HAN!
Children 11 and Under GET IN FREE!*
*With a paying adult.
NEAL ADAMS
JOHN ROMITA JR
Creator of Kick Ass
Hundreds of CREATORS, PUBLISHERS and EXHIBITORS!
CHARLIE ADLARD
MAHMUD ASRAR
LEE BERMEJO
MARK BROOKS
MARK FARMER
GARY FRANK
DAVE GIBBONS
STEPHANIE HANS
KLAUS JANSON
BOB LAYTON
DAVID MACK
CLAY MANN
ED McGUINNESS
MICHAEL AVON OEMING
BILL SIENKIEWICZ
TAKI SOMA
PLUS ELIAS CHATZOUDIS, IAN CHURCHILL, YILDIRAY CINAR, NEIL EDWARDS, RAHSAN EKEDEL, GARY ERSKINE, LEE GARBETT, JEREMY HUAN, PAUL LEVITZ, DAVID LLOYD, EMANUELLA LUPPACHINO, MIKE NORTON, SABINE RICH, VICTOR SANTOS, TIM SEELEY, JAMIE TYNDALL, DEXTER VINES, CHRISTIAN WARD, JOHN WATSON, JK WOODWARD & CHRISSIE ZULLO!
LONDON Super costume CHAMPIONSHIP
See website for rules of entry.
twitter.com/LSComicCon
facebook.com/LondonSuperComicConvention
Buy tickets - www.londonsupercomicconvention.com
The Avengers © Marvel Characters, Inc. Batman © DC Comics.

H1Z1

CONCEPT No one at Daybreak Game Company is masking the fact that *H1Z1* is essentially the developer's take on *DayZ*, promising to bring its own MMO spin on the concept.

Yawn of the dead

For all the praise it gets from developers, Early Access – or alphafunding, whichever term you prefer – can do as much harm as good. *H1Z1* launched to expected server problems, but even outside of that initial bitter taste there's been quite a bit of scorn for the new zombie survival MMO. It had problems with loot – as in, there was none – it had problems with lag, it even had problems with its own monetisation system. Yet its biggest issue, the one that Daybreak Game Company really needs to address quickly, is simply its familiarity. *DayZ* was something of a boom, a sudden rise in popularity that – though it is still played today – has dramatically dropped off, for one reason or another. Even after prompt patches that addressed many problems, *H1Z1* could well suffer simply because it isn't – not *yet*, anyway – providing enough of a distinction between itself and Dean Hall's unexpected success.

The first hour of playing *H1Z1* is much like any first hour of *DayZ*. You'll spawn in a forested landmass, scavenge for berries and head off to the nearest town in the hopes of finding a weapon before your untimely death at the hands of another overzealous player. Part of *H1Z1*'s problem is the passiveness of its zombie hordes, though 'horde' is perhaps the wrong word to use. Any one group is unlikely to have more than ten or twenty of the shuffling dead, and though noise and light will attract them it's rare – if ever – that they'll prove a threat. That makes for a particularly antagonistic playerbase, because without the fear of potential brain-munching, *H1Z1*'s gamers are free to act a little more recklessly. It makes for a very consistent experience, and that's not anything a zombie survival experience should be; it's as much in the emergent stories you can tell, and *H1Z1* has none of those. Not *yet*, anyway.

///Therein lies the problem with Early Access. Much of *H1Z1* still lies in its promise, in the grand schemes that Daybreak has planned. Get enough co-operation going and you'll manage to craft a fairly secure compound – even if elements such as jails aren't working just yet – but to what end? As soon as you and your friends log off, that entire base is a free-for-all, and there's little that can be done to prevent that. Traps are confirmed and will make that base a little more defendable when you're not there, but it still doesn't address the lack of permanence. It was a problem that *DayZ* suffered, too; once you log off you literally disappear. When concepts such as player-built community hubs and trading are intended to be such key features of *H1Z1*, it's hard to look at the current build and imagine this dream ever being achieved. It's too easy to survive, inexplicable murder aside, so what use is trading if you can scavenge and craft everything you need and simply take everything you can't when someone logs off? Why bargain a hypothetical community's allotment of fuel against a stash of food when it's just as easy to live off blackberries? Surviving the world itself – not the players – needs to be a much more prevalent threat if a sense of natural collaboration is ever going to happen. Potential is such a damning word these days, but that's really all *H1Z1* is at this point.

> "I look at H1Z1 not as an MMO. It's got nothing to do with MMOs. It's a session based persistent online game"
>
> **JOHN SMEDLEY** DAYBREAK GAME COMPANY

By going into early access so soon – without those differentiating features in place and working – Daybreak now has a much harder task convincing players that this is going to be much more than a *DayZ* homage.

It seems unfair to so heavily criticise a game still in alpha – things will change, things will improve – but so far it's clear that Daybreak's focus is too much on *DayZ* and not nearly enough on what it hopes its own game should be. All the same, there are immediate problems that need to be rectified before it's even comparable – the passive zombies, for example. Time will tell whether *H1Z1* has the breadth of vision to separate itself from its obvious inspiration, but as it stands it simply doesn't have enough reasons to get involved at this early stage. Not *yet*, anyway.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Daybreak Game Company
Developer: In-house
Release: TBA
Players: Massively Multiplayer

Developer Profile

Daybreak Game Company (formerly Sony Online Entertainment) is a behemoth developer, and while its games might not be as identifiable with the MMO genre as *World Of Warcraft* is now, the developer itself certainly is. With *EverQuest*, *PlanetSide*, *DC Universe Online* and *Star Wars Galaxies* as part of its stable, it's not a company to ignore.

Developer History

EverQuest 1999 [PC]
Star Wars Galaxies 2003 [PC]
PlanetSide 2003 [PC]
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdoms 2006 [PS3]
Free Realms 2009 [PC]
DC Universe Online 2011 [PC]
PlanetSide 2 2012 [PC]

High Point

It seems a shame to point to its earliest title as SOE's most important game, but considering it set in stone what we've come to expect from MMOs even now *EverQuest* is a game whose heritage continues to live on.









Above: Loot was such a scarcity on launch of Early Access that it'd be common to get to a built-up town like this one and *still* find there isn't anything of use.

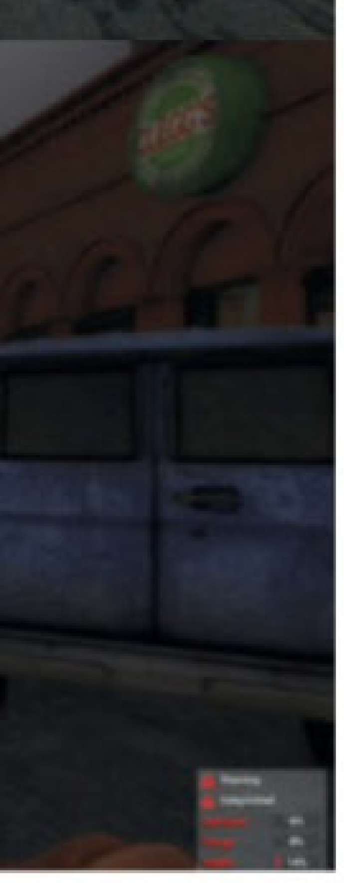


TO THE VICTOR, THE SPOILS

One of the most controversial additions to the game is Supply Drops, purchasable keys of sorts that – when activated – will send out a plane to drop a crate of goodies (often with weapons) near to your location. The sound of a passing plane and the flashing lights of the descending crate naturally leads to something of a royal rumble in a bid to claim the contents. While you might not actually gain access to your paid-for rewards – which, in itself, feels a little unfair – gamers were calling this out as an unfair advantage to those willing to pay. The thrill of the fight is something that should be maintained, but it is admittedly a very clunky and morally suspect system that may need to be reconsidered.







Above: A bow will likely be one of your first weapons, and with craftable ammo it can be quite a boon to have early on.
Below: If there's no threat in *H1Z1*'s zombies – at this time it's pretty easy to punch large groups to death – and it's possible to survive living off wild blackberries, then it's not really a zombie survival experience.









"The game world is designed to facilitate emergent gameplay, giving you the tools and freedom to play how you want to play, so you can create strategies and scenarios that not even we had anticipated!"
KICKSTARTER PAGE 5 LIVES STUDIOS

While *Satellite Reign* sticks to an isometric view throughout, the camera does turn and pan a little to make sure you always have a good view of the action when taller structures might get in the way.

Satellite Reign

CONCEPT ■ Control a four-character team of agents as you attempt to topple the corportate structures that have bought out democracy. Class-based tactical action is the order of the day

Giving the people what they want

Do you know what 5 Lives did right with its first game as a new studio? It found a community of gamers who weren't being reached out to and gave them what they wanted. After the *Syndicate* reboot was revealed, many fans of the original games felt ignored and left behind. It wasn't the strategy game they had hoped for. Mike Diskett of 5 Lives Studios worked on *Syndicate* and *Syndicate Wars* and he wants those fans to think of *Satellite Reign* as their spiritual sequel.

It certainly has all the trappings of that classic series in terms of setting and gameplay. The dingy and rain-soaked streets are lit by neon signs and video advertisements. Your team of agents is suitably decked out in ankle-length leather trench coats, dark glasses and in some instances even some rather natty face masks. Mechanical augmentation is the order of the day, corporations rule the world and cars float around the streets with impossibly good braking mechanisms so they don't run over your team.

And what's perhaps more important is that those things still work as a setting. It's still a tense and threatening landscape to explore and what 5 Lives has created here is a very open and inviting city to get lost in. Missions can be selected as you wish from a selection offered to you. You can head off for high-value targets in your mission to free the people from the police state they have found themselves in or you can pick off some of the weaker targets and gradually level up your team of agents in their various skills. The breakdown is essentially Heavy, Hacker, Support and Sniper and while you can choose to play stealthily or go in noisy, all of them will be of use to you in a mission.

At this early stage there's still some work to do tightening up some of the controls and the AI pathfinding, while jumping in a car can be a rather strange experience, but everything is there and it's all very promising. The strategic possibilities in such an open world are many. Approaching a police station for instance we could head straight through the hacked front gate or work our way around the side, gradually picking off security cameras, sneaking our team through the compound to find fresh tech or intel. It's all very intuitive and the enemy AI is a force to be reckoned with. It's smart enough to notice a guy in a trench coat standing at the edge of a wall even if he's technically 'in cover'. Line of sight is really what's important and guns need to be hidden when not in combat. *Satellite Reign* really looks like a worthy standard bearer for *Syndicate* fans.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC, Mac, Linux
Origin: Australia
Publisher: 5 Lives Studios
Developer: In-house
Release: TBC 2015
Players: 1

Developer Profile

As a brand new studio out of Brisbane, Australia, 5 Lives Studios has no credits to its name so far, but Mike Diskett's CV is an impressive one, placing the original *Syndicate*, *Theme Park* and *GTA IV* in its back catalogue of experience to draw from.

Developer History

Syndicate **1993 [Amiga]**
Urban Chaos **1999 [Multi]**
Grand Theft Auto IV **2008 [Multi]**

High Point

Syndicate is certainly the game with the closest ties to what *Satellite Reign* is attempting to achieve, but you can't really look past *GTA IV* as the biggest title anyone on this team has been involved with.





■ Above: This is a living, breathing world where NPCs will carry on about their business and react to how you behave. Best to keep your guns hidden.



THE UK'S BIGGEST MODERN POP CULTURE EVENTS
MCM COMIC CON
RETURNING IN 2015
TELFORD
14 FEBRUARY
BIRMINGHAM
21-22 MARCH
BELFAST
4-5 APRIL
LONDON
22-24 MAY
MANCHESTER
25-26 JULY
DUBLIN
29-30 AUGUST
GLASGOW
26-27 SEPTEMBER
LONDON
23-25 OCTOBER
BIRMINGHAM
21-22 NOVEMBER
MCMEXPO
BUY TICKETS ONLINE
COMICS • MANGA • COSPLAY • MOVIES • VIDEO GAMES • ANIME
MEMORABILIA
popasia
Culture • Food • Music • Fashion
MCM eSports
VIDFEST UK
Kids Go Free*
WWW.MCMCOMICCON.COM
* Kids Go Free, Children 10 and Under go free if accompanied by a paying adult. Max 2 free children per adult, applies to entry tickets after 11am on each day



THE LONG HALLOWEEN

■ ASYLUM'S ATMOSPHERE FELT a little bit summery – like you were trapped in a glasshouse on a steamy night. *City* was the exact opposite; it was all wintry, cold, snowy. *Knight* targets a less extreme season – since Batman is in his twilight years, we're seeing him operate in autumn… which makes us think the storyline is actually going to follow one of the more disturbing and intense Batman arcs – *The Long Halloween*.

THE KNIGHT TEMPLAR

■ YOU MIGHT NOTICE Batman's armour is a little different to what you'd have seen in *City* or *Asylum* – that's because the team at Rocksteady has intentionally redesigned his suit to pair up with the Batmobile. The new design really comes down to cosmetic realism – there's now armour over the top of Bats' cape, and his chest piece has been shaped for velocity and launching out of his car.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4, Xbox One, PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Rocksteady Studios
Release: 2 June
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Rocksteady was founded in 2004 by Sefton Hill and Jamie Walker, and after developing only one game (*Urban Chaos: Riot Response*) was given the Batman IP to work with. Since then the studio has proven itself worthy of the name, making some of the most critically acclaimed superhero games we've seen in decades.

Developer History

Urban Chaos: Riot Response
2006 [PS2, Xbox]
Batman: Arkham Asylum
2009 [PS3, 360, PC]
Batman: Arkham City
2011 [PS3, 360, PC, Wii U]



DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

■ THE BIGGEST OMISSION from the *Batman* games so far has been the Batmobile. Throwing the armoured vehicle in just for the sake of it wouldn't have been too satisfying, though, so Rocksteady has made sure to give it extra functionality. The Batmobile's inclusion adds an interesting extra flourish to the missions, and we're hoping the car can be used to fulfil other objectives, too.

Batman: Arkham Knight

CONCEPT ■ Bruce Wayne returns to the streets one year after the events of *Arkham City*, ready to take down Scarecrow, who's rallied Bats' enemies against him

The Knight is darkest just before the dawn…

Who'd have thought that an action game about *not* killing things would turn out so well? It turns out that Batman has enough going on under his cape to keep us interested, even when there's no bloodshed involved. Who needs guns when you've got explosive gel or an anti-personnel grappling hook? The reaction to the combat system in the *Arkham* series has been fascinating – where some players despair of its repetitive function, others can't get enough, chaining combos like there's no tomorrow, proving that not only are they Gotham's greatest detective, but also its most dangerous brawler.

The newest entry in the *Arkham* quadrilogy promises to double-down on the combat, addressing concerns raised on the last *Batman* game's release – the non-Rocksteady developed *Arkham Origins*. Now that the franchise is back in the hands of its true parent, though, we're expecting Bats to be in the best shape he's ever been… almost like he's just come back from having his spine shattered by Bane.

SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

BURLY MEN AT SEA

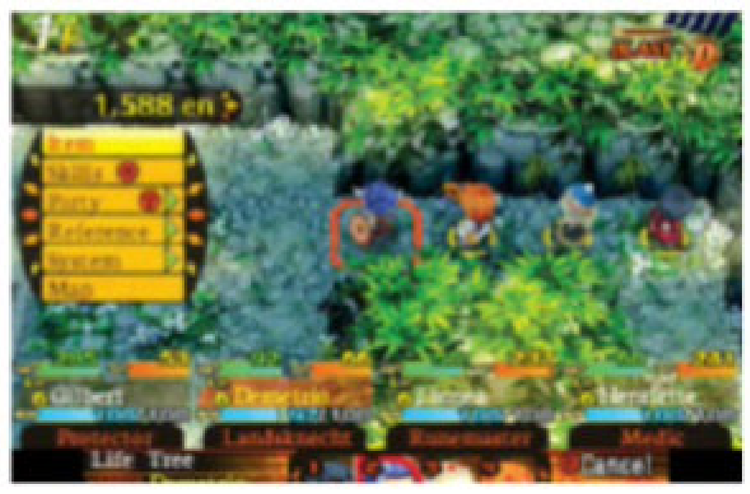
Format: iOS, Android, PC
Publisher: Brain&Brain
Developer: In-House
ETA: TBC 2015



DON'T BE FOOLED by the name – *Burly Men At Sea* isn't as damp and angry as you'd expect. In fact, the art style and the game's theme are actually quite cartoony and soft, more *Hohokum* than *Gears Of War*. You play as a navigator and (interestingly) storyteller to a trio of bearded men, guiding them from port to port. We're anticipating shanties ahoy from the husband and wife development team that has already bought us the charming *Doggins*.

ETRIAN MYSTERY DUNGEON

Format: 3DS
Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Spike Chunsoft
ETA: Q2 2015



ETRIAN MYSTERY DUNGEON will take classes and characters compiled from the history of the *Etrian* franchise, fitting them all into a top-down RPG that will be inevitably complicated and satisfying to those with a hunger for mathematically-aligned JRPGs. From what we've seen so far, the game looks a bit like *The Witch & The Hundred Knight* – a game we'd rather forget – but at least *Mystery Dungeon* can build on *Etrian*'s rich legacy to support it's core gameplay.

BLACK THE FALL

Format: PC, iOS, Android
Publisher: Sand Sailor Studio
Developer: In-house
ETA: 2015



SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ODDWORLD and *Limbo* lies *Black The Fall* – a 2.5D monochromatic stealth platformer, with great emphasis on world building and atmosphere. It's a throwback to the old cinematic platformers that were so prevalent in the 90s, with all the slick UI and graphical over-lay you'd expect of a modern game. It's given us more faith in the Square Enix Collective independent publishing initiative – it's one of the scheme's sophomore games.

POKÉMON SHUFFLE

Format: 3DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house
ETA: 2015



EVERYTHING'S BETTER WITH Pokémon in it right? Even match-three puzzles? Apparently so, according to Nintendo's newest free-to-play title coming exclusively to the 3DS. The aim is to match three monsters at a time, creating combos and gaining points until you can evolve certain chains of the critters within a set amount of moves. You get five attempts – use any more and you have to wait for your hearts to regenerate.

ENTER THE GUNGEON

Format: PS4
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: Dodge Roll
ETA: 2015



A PROCEDURALLY GENERATED dungeon crawling shoot-em-up sounds like a horrible mesh of genres, but you'd be surprised at how well they all travel, hand-in-hand. There's a slew of playable characters that each have their own unique backstories, and as you delve deeper in the gun-dungeons (hence *Gungeon*, right?), the levels will evolve. Fun and fast, but apparently almost impossible to master.

PROJECT TREASURE

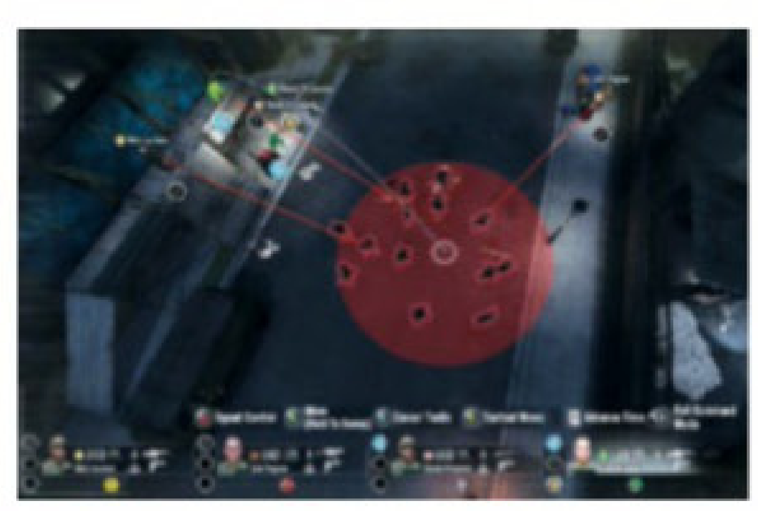
Format: Wii U
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Dimps
ETA: 2015



A FREE-TO-PLAY ACTION game being developed specifically for the Wii U, *Project Treasure* is another curio to come from the mind of Katsuhiro Harada – the man behind *Tekken*. Unlike his most successful franchise, though, *Project Treasure* is aimed at a broader audience – a little like Harada's other project, *Pokkén Tournament*. We assume *Project Treasure* is a working title (at least, we hope it is…).

BREACH & CLEAR: DEADLINE

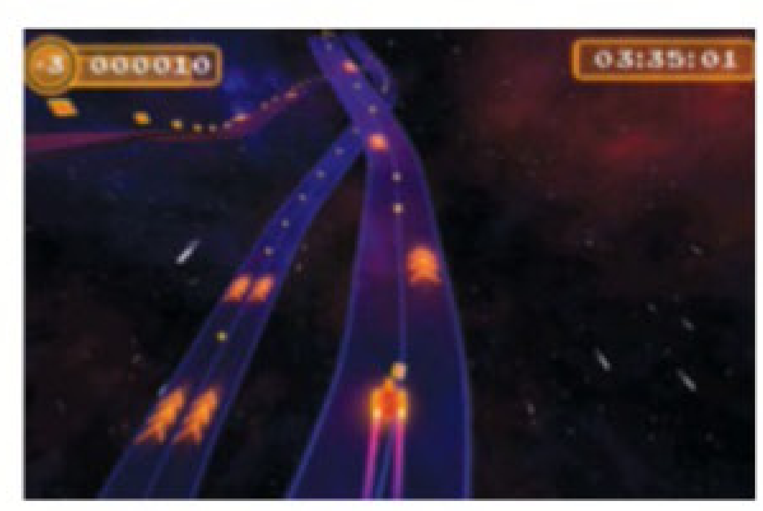
Format: PC
Publisher: Gambitious, Devolver Digital
Developer: Mighty Rabbit Studios, Gun Media
ETA: 2015



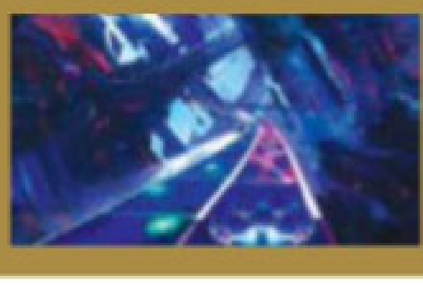
THE ORIGINAL GAME launched to a fairly lukewarm arrival, but it was by no means a failure – on the contrary, *Breach & Clear* managed to establish a decent core fanbase and the semi-sequel, *Deadline*, looks set to improve the zombie-slaying action by, well, giving you more zombies. The enemies in the first game were smart and wily, now *Deadline* reneges on that, going back to hordes of undead..

SPECTRA

Format: Xbox One, iOS, Android
Publisher: Gateway Interactive
Developer: In-house
ETA: 2015



EVER PLAY *Super Hexagon*? Remember how incredible the soundtrack was? Well, Chipzel – the composer of the OST – has also provided music for *Spectra*, the punishing reaction-testing on-rails racer. Think *Audiosurf*, but where the track is procedurally generated and you've got a good idea of what *Spectra* is – the key to surviving the game's random attacks on your consciousness is to remain sharp.



DELAYED – Amplitude (PS3, PS4)

The *Rock Band* studio has pushed the release date for *Amplitude* back from March 2015 to a window later in the year – with the studio tentatively aiming for a summer release.



CANCELLED – Human Element (Multi)

It seems *Human Element* is destined to stay in development purgatory – weeks after its reannouncement, the game's developer, Robotoki, closed its doors, putting the game on indefinite hiatus.

RAIN WORLD

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **James & Joar**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2015**



FUNDED VIA KICKSTARTER – where it made twice the money it needed – *Rain World* is an intriguing pixel-art puzzle platformer built by a two-man team in its own custom engine. The game features really impressive physics – the playable characters are half-cat, half-slug that have to move between land and water. It looks like it'll be pushing the animations and moves of its creatures to the limit, and we're already in love with the character models.

TECHNOBABYLON

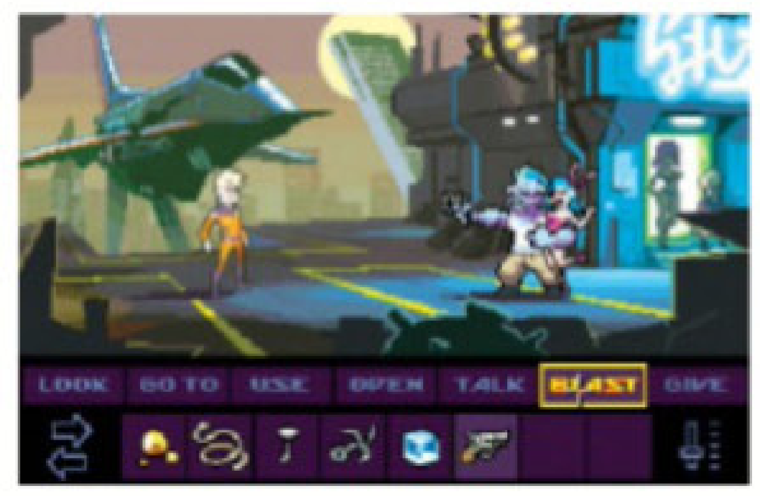
Format: **PC, Mac, Linux**
Publisher: **Wadjet Eye Games**
Developer: **James Dearden**
ETA: **2015**



TECHNOBABYLON WAS ORIGINALLY constructed as an episodic eight-part series – the first three episodes were made back in 2010. The game is fully constructed, apparently, but the developer/publisher partners want to record a voice track. *TechnoBabylon* is a point-and-click adventure with thriller elements taking you through a cyber-punk city as an undercover secret policeman. If that doesn't get your Orwellian juices flowing, nothing will.

STARR MAZER

Format: **PC, Mac, Linux**
Publisher: **Imagos Software**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2015**



STARR MAZER WAS born from the idea of a 'montage game' – a project that would have been a selection of gameplay clips that were supposed to be a backdrop to a movie set in the foreground. But then the clips merged into this game that the producers thought was too good to pass up. Each playthrough is affected by the player's choices – the episodes for each run are never in a specific order. It's like a genre game buffet.

MEVIUS FINAL FANTASY

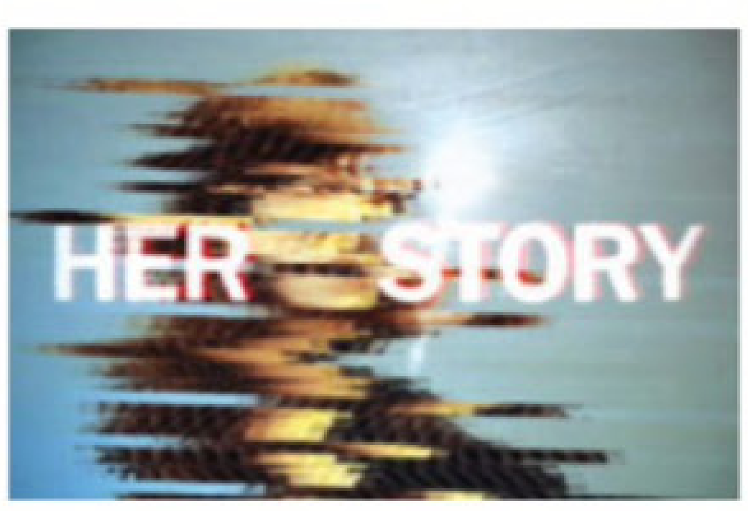
Format: **iOS, Android**
Publisher: **Square Enix**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2015**



AS THE NUMBERED entries in the *Final Fantasy* series have been getting less popular with players, Square Enix is trying everything it can to bring appeal back to the series. The company is developing a core *Final Fantasy* game for mobile – *Mevius* is planned to be 'comparable' with its console peers. It's being created by veterans of the franchise: Tabata, Kitase and Nojima are all involved, and the team see it as a 'main' game instead of a spin-off.

HER STORY

Format: **Vita, PS4**
Publisher: **Sony Computer Entertainment**
Developer: **Zeboyd Games**
ETA: **2015**



THE WRITER OF *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories*, Sam Barlow, has turned his attention to crime fiction with *Her Story* – a unique game that uses full FMV clips to weave a non-linear story. You're rifling through a police database, piecing together a crime that the protagonist apparently committed, but you've got reason to think otherwise… The narrative will be self-referential, self-effacing and riddled with tricks.

GUILD OF DUNGEONEERING

Format: **PC, iOS, Android**
Publisher: **Versus Evil**
Developer: **Gambrinous**
ETA: **2015**



BUILD A DUNGEON, then fight through it. Sound good? Well, that's the elevator pitch of *Guild Of Dungeoneering*. You start with a hand of five cards, which can be any one of three types – enemy, item or dungeon floor. Once your hero enters the dungeon, you can't move it – it navigates automatically – but you're given another hand of cards to use in combat. There are many levels to it, but it never gets top-heavy with mechanics.

CHILDREN OF MORTA

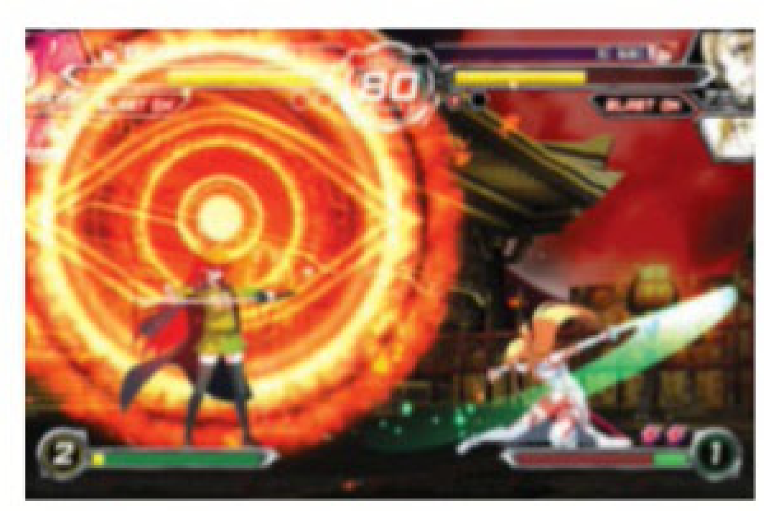
Format: **PC, Mac, Linux**
Publisher: **Dead Mage**
Developer: **In-House**
ETA: **2015**



A NARRATIVE-BASED roguelike hack 'n' slash that centres around the adventures of one family – the Bergsons. The Bergsons were living on the cursed mount Morta before the mountain's god became corrupted. This corruption caused all the animals to become vicious monsters and it's up to the Bergsons to return peace to their homeland. Will that involve killing a god? Probably.

DENGEKI BUNKO FIGHTING CLIMAX

Format: **PS3, Vita**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Ecole and French Bread**
ETA: **Summer 2015**



THE DENGEKI BUNKO imprint has quite a wide roster of games under its belt – *Sword Art Online*, *A Certain Magical Index* and *Durarara* are all properties affiliated with the eponymous label. As such, *Dengeki Bunko Fighting Climax* is a game that combines characters from the whole roster and pits them against each other in a game designed to celebrate Dengeki Bunko's 20th anniversary.



A New Hope

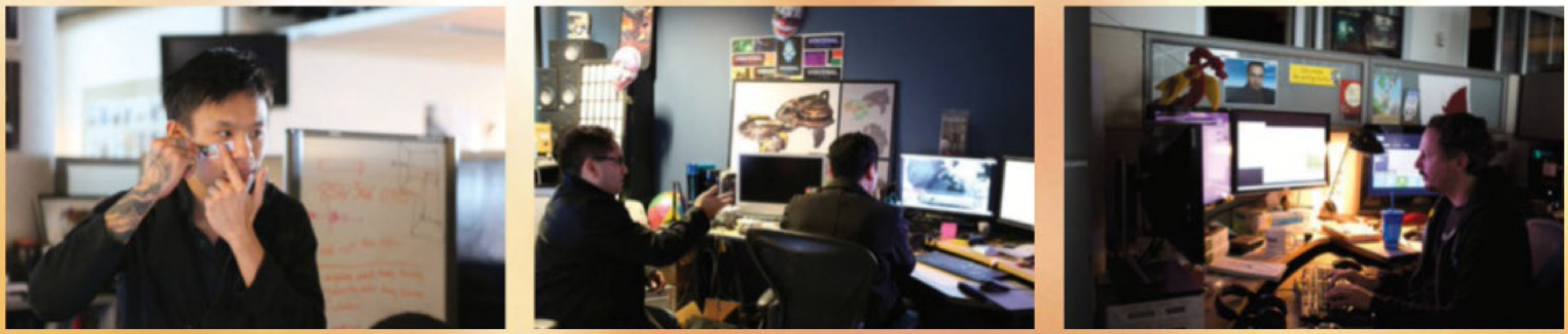
Visceral Games wants to prove that EA can give gamers the products they want. We caught up with Visceral's creative director and general manager to talk about its plans to restore Battlefield's name and prepare to launch itself back into space...

"Visceral Games' growth has definitely been an evolution over time," explains Milham – once upon a time he was the art director on the *Dead Space* series, but since the studio took on the *Battlefield* franchise, he's been promoted to creative director. "We cut our teeth on a lot of the licenced stuff a few years ago, culminating with *From Russia With Love* – which had a certain number of our team on that title; [development] in that ended in 2005."

Visceral started out as a branch of EA specialising on the publisher's licenced games – *The Lord Of The Rings, James Bond, The Godfather, The Simpsons* – the games might not have been the best of Visceral's output, but working within the confines of the licence the team at least made good games – projects that weren't just cynical cash-ins. EA allowed Redwood Shores (Visceral's name at the time) to go off and do its own thing within the publisher's properties. Then, the team decided they deserved to work on their own IP – all Redwood Shores' games had been profitable, and all had reviewed well, so now it wanted to join the ranks of the EA elite: Criterion, DICE, Maxis, EA Montreal.

"We just felt like it was time we put our foot down… I mean in that time we made a bunch of different kinds of games, it wasn't just licenced games," says Milham. "We had ideas about the game we wanted to make, so [EA] gave us a short chance to experiment, and that experiment gradually grew into *Dead Space*." *Dead Space* was proof that Redwood Shores could stand alone, that it could be trusted to do its own thing, that it was a studio worthy of note. A critical and commercial success, its cinematically-influenced storyline complemented the meticulously-designed world wonderfully, and the unique spin the game took on UI and combat found a place in the hearts of players that were quickly becoming disenfranchised with the other third-person shooters on offer at the time.

"[Developing *Dead Space*] taught us a lot, we learned a lot," reveals Milham. "I think we took a step up in quality; we learned about what kinds of games we wanted to make and what we wanted to do. That's when we sort of aligned around that type of game-making and that's how the name Visceral came up." In 2009, a year after *Dead Space*'s launch, EA Redwood Shores transformed – the one million sales of *Dead Space* allowed it to break out of its EA-branded identity and choose a name for itself. It became Visceral, and by 2010, *Dead Space* had sold *another* million copies. »



The Visceral team works closely: designers, writers, programmers, audio engineers, artists, narrative consultants – all work together in a tight system.

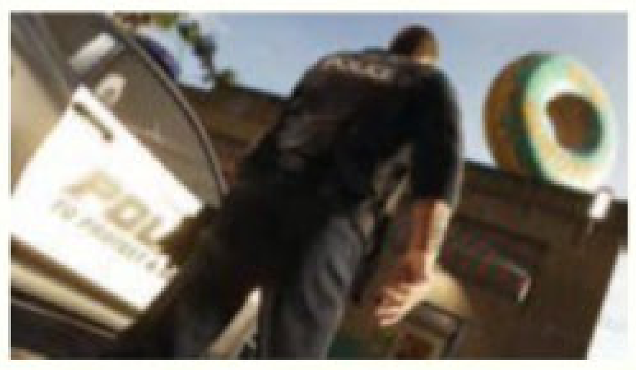


What's more likely to get you in the mood – sitting behind a keyboard looking at source material, or an action photoshoot designed to make you feel like an elite cop?

Dead Space proved to be a juggernaut of a franchise – the gaming audience apparently hungry for the sci-fi space-Gothicism that *Dead Space* was built around. Interesting, innovative gunplay, claustrophobia, constraint, Lovecraftian evils and body horror apparently made for a creation that gamers couldn't consume quick enough. Visceral continued on, with other (admittedly less successful) ventures: *Dante's Inferno*, *Army Of Two: The Devil's Cartel* and the studio's first brushing with *Battlefield* in the *Battlefield 3* add-on, *End Game*. Visceral went from strength to strength, but it was time to move on. "I think we all learned a philosophy of making games from the *Dead Space* days, and developed a hunger for quality that has served us all since then," Milham reflects.

"We went through three… well, if you count *Dead Space: Extraction* – which some of us worked on – we went through four games in the *Dead Space* series and that led us up to a couple of years ago," Milham describes, counting the years out. "To be honest it just felt like a lot of us had worked on that for six or seven years, and we felt like it was time to try something else. Around that same time we were trading tips and hanging out more with our sister studio DICE and [the idea of working on *Battlefield*] just sort of organically came up, 'Hey, why don't we try something fresh and different over here?' we said. And they were also looking to maybe have some more *Battlefield* help and it organically grew from that – some of us have been playing *Battlefield* since it came out in the very beginning."

Milam told us that he and the team at Visceral appreciated *Battlefield*, that they thought the series was ready to be taken in a separate direction – the foundations for *Battlefield* had been established: the 32-player death



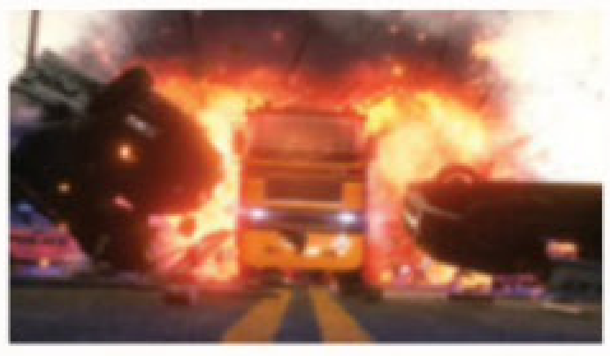


The motorbike – which you'll see a lot of in *Hardline* – was actually something Visceral introduced to *Battlefield 3* way back in 2013, when it released the *End Game* DLC package.

matches, the tactical modes, the vehicles, the squads… it all worked, and worked well. But *Battlefield* needed a change, and Visceral wanted to do something *different*.

"When we were first talking with the DICE guys, we wanted to establish [a new direction for the series] and DICE was totally open to it," Milham recounts. "It kind of felt like the right move; the idea was not to annualise the franchise, in this invisible 'Every Fall we come out with a *Battlefield* and they are all the same' type of plan. I think what's so awesome about the foundation that *Battlefield* has built up is that those mechanics and that amount of stuff going on, you can really adapt to a lot of different things. So yeah, from the beginning we were like 'We don't just want to do another numbered one', you know – *Battlefield 5* or something – DICE is doing a pretty fine job of that already. So we were interested in doing a fresh take on it, and I hope people enjoy it."

This fresh take *Battlefield* focuses on revolves around three core facets – an improved single-player experience, a focus on speed and the fulfillment of everyone's inner 'cop fantasy'. Milham explains it further: "What I loved about the 'cops 'n' robbers' pitch is a couple of things; it's instantly relatable, people get it. There's not a lot of world building or explaining to do. The fantasies are very common, it felt like the game modes and experiences just immediately suggested themselves. If you joined our team and you wrote a list – 'In a cops and robbers game, here's what I wanna do: if I'm a robber, I want to rob banks. If I'm a cop, I want to go 'WOOP!' with the lights [laughs]' – your list would probably mirror very closely what we already wrote.



Action alone wasn't enough for Visceral in *Battlefield: Hardline* – the team wanted to emulate the kind of cinematography you see in high-budget TV shows nowadays, and it's done it well.

So it felt like we had a real target to hit with it, and I think we have. The music, the characters, the whole thing, it felt different and fresh compared to what's out there."

Milham's right – *Hardline* does feel incredibly different to what's already out there. Using Visceral's trademark penchant for reality and a development style that's more grounded in reality, *Hardline* presents itself as a more understandable, character-centred game… well, at least the single-player mode does. "You see a certain industry trend, I think, going towards sci-fi, as people have done a lot of modern military. But we had just spent seven years making sci-fi games, and we just felt like it was time for something different. And here was a whole spot that we felt could be cool and fresh in the marketplace."

Visceral takes its narrative experiences seriously – you need only take a cursory glance at a *Dead Space* synopsis to see that – and *Hardline* is no different. You hear a lot of developers making false promises when it comes to delivering film-rivalling, cinematically-inspired games, though, so we asked what makes *Hardline* different – what makes it stand out from the military simulator-lite games that flood the FPS genre.

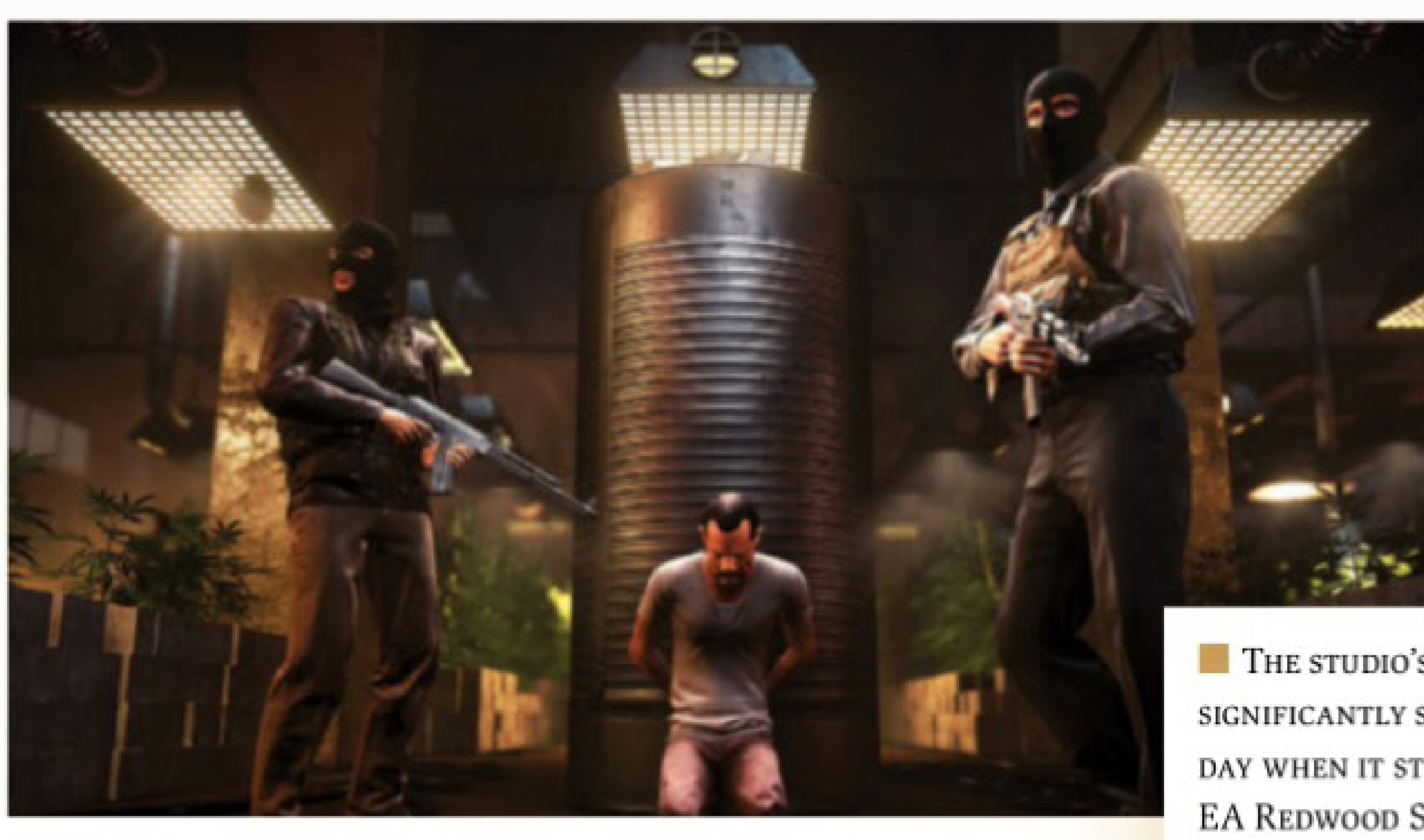
"Our goal is not to make a realistic police simulator," Milham replies. "It never was and it still isn't. We wanted to feel much more like a quality crime drama. One of the things that we love about this setting is that there's no need for a lot of plot and world building. There's no crazy ex-Russian general trying to use a nuclear weapon to destroy the world. We don't have to come up with a silly excuse to create World War III."

"The cops and criminals thing just feels like such an under-explored area," explains Visceral's vice president and general manager, Steve Papoutsis. "There's a bunch of great stuff there, whether you look at books, TV, music, comics – it's been part of our culture for so long, so we had a lot of great material to draw from." But focusing on a more domestic theme comes with its own dilemmas – the publicity campaign for *Hardline* could arguably have hit some bad timing when it began after E3 last year, in the wake of the Ferguson unrest in Missouri. Police brutality and the excessive use of force was an uneasy topic in America at the time, and some of the *Hardline* publicity garnered a negative reaction from consumers.

We asked Milham if the media reaction to the incidents had in any way altered how Visceral was approaching its key theme. "We haven't necessarily toned down anything [in *Hardline*] as a reaction to [Ferguson], specifically. I think the issues of police use of force and militarisation are real, and have certainly come to the forefront more than we knew or expected when we started this project.

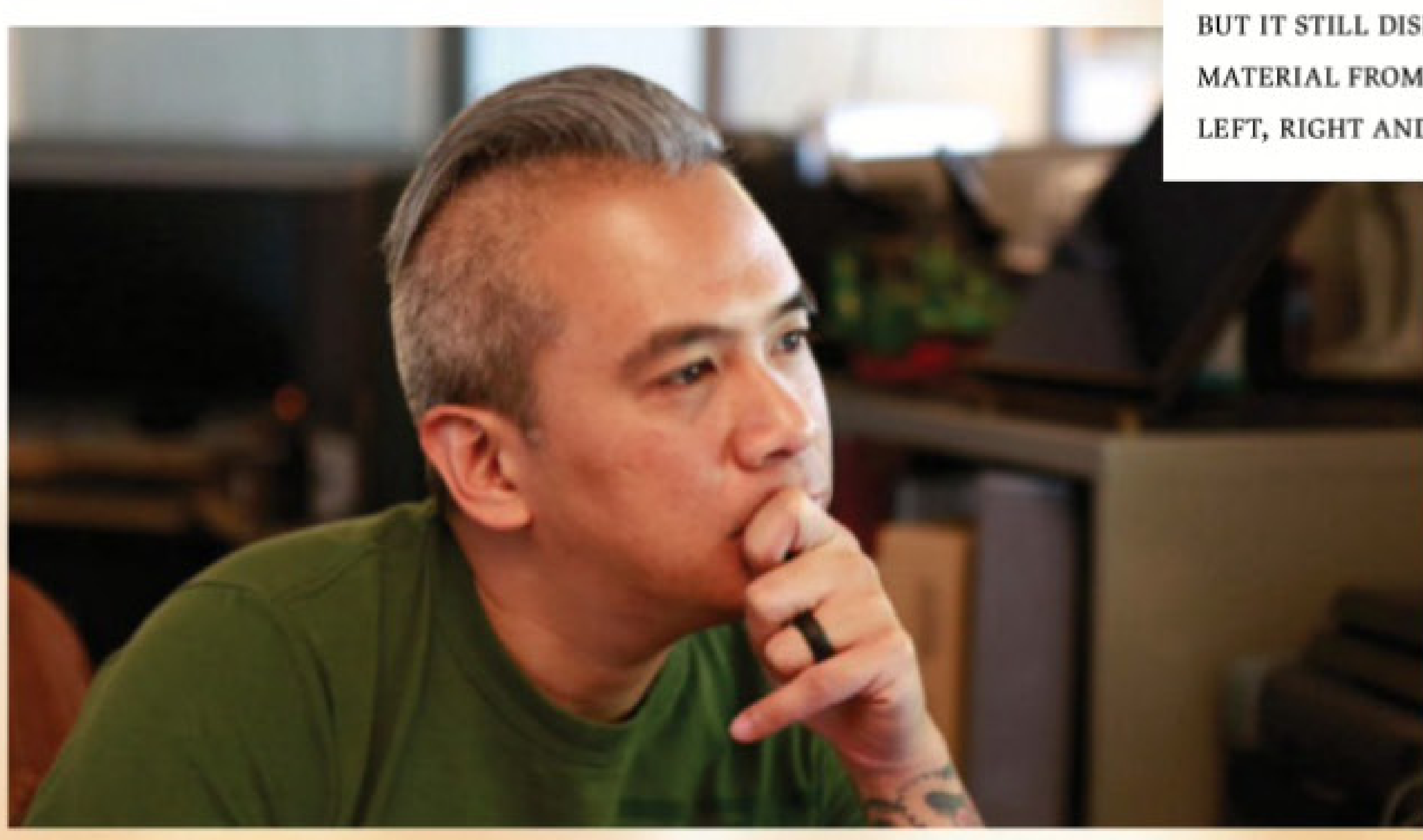
"But, I think when people see and play what we are doing the differences will be clear. Our police are also jumping off of skyscrapers with parachutes, and *yes*, they are using *wildly* excessive force to stop bank robbers. But that's because we are doing a cops 'n' robbers fantasy world, not an accurate police simulator."

> "I think we all learned a philosophy of making games and a hunger for quality that has served us all since then"





The studio's grown significantly since back in the day when it still carried the EA Redwood Shores moniker, but it still displays promotional material from its previous games left, right and centre.

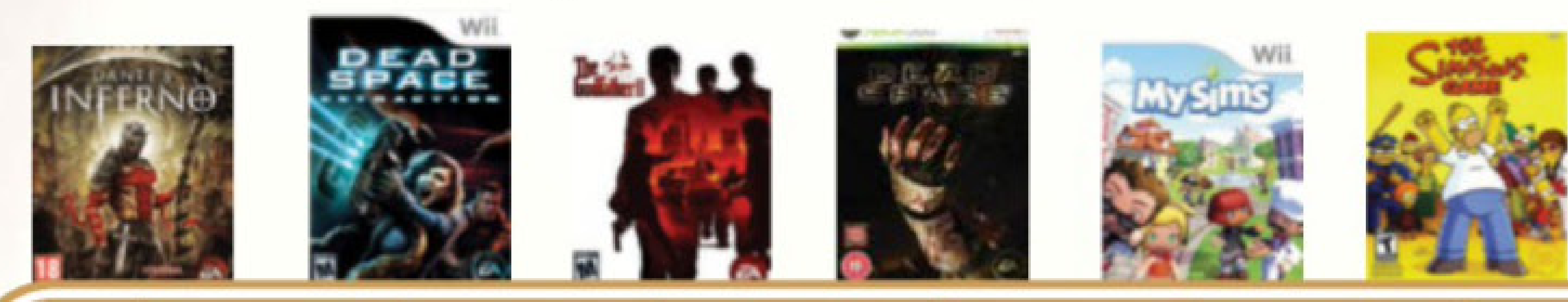




A Studio Of Evolution



- **JAMES BOND 007: AGENT UNDER FIRE** 2001 — PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE
- **THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING** 2003 — PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, GBA, PC, MAC
- **JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING** 2004 — PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE
- **THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE** 2004 — PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE
- **JAMES BOND 007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE** 2005 — PS2, XBOX,
- **THE GODFATHER: THE GAME** 2006 — PS2, PS3, PSP, XBOX, XBOX 360, WII



- **DANTE'S INFERNO** 2010 — PS3, XBOX 360
- **DEAD SPACE: EXTRACTION** 2009 — PS3, WII
- **THE GODFATHER II** 2009 — PS3, XBOX 360, PC
- **DEAD SPACE** 2008 — PS3, XBOX 360, PC
- **MY SIMS** 2007 — WII, DS, PC (2008)
- **THE SIMPSONS GAME** 2007 — PS3, XBOX 360



- **DEAD SPACE IGNITION** 2010 — PSN, XBLA
- **DEAD SPACE 2** 2011 — PS3, XBOX 360, PC
- **DEAD SPACE 3** 2013 — PS3, XBOX 360, PC
- **BATTLEFIELD 3: END GAME DLC** 2013 — PS3, XBOX 360, PC
- **ARMY OF TWO: THE DEVIL'S CARTEL** 2013 — PS3, XBOX 360
- **BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE** 2015 — PS3, PS4, XBOX 360, XBOX ONE, PC

The difference between a flight of fantasy like *Hardline* versus, say, an *actual* commentary on the military and modern society's blurred morality when it comes to invasion (let's say *Spec Ops: The Line*, for example…) is that *Hardline* takes a much more intimate approach with its characters. If keeping Isaac Clarke's festering insanity alive for three games has taught the studio *anything*, it's how to make the player genuinely care about their in-game avatar.

"The characters *are* the story," states Milham. "They already know each other and they are already opposed from each other, and all you need is good characters and cracking dialogue to get somewhere cool with it. So we went to the people who know that stuff the best." And Visceral really did. Bill Johnson – a director on hit cop show *Justified*, was brought on board to help with the concept and tone of the game, alongside narrative consultant Wendy Calhoun, who was a writer on *Justified*, *Empire* and *Nashville* – all featuring stories the game is keen to learn lessons from.

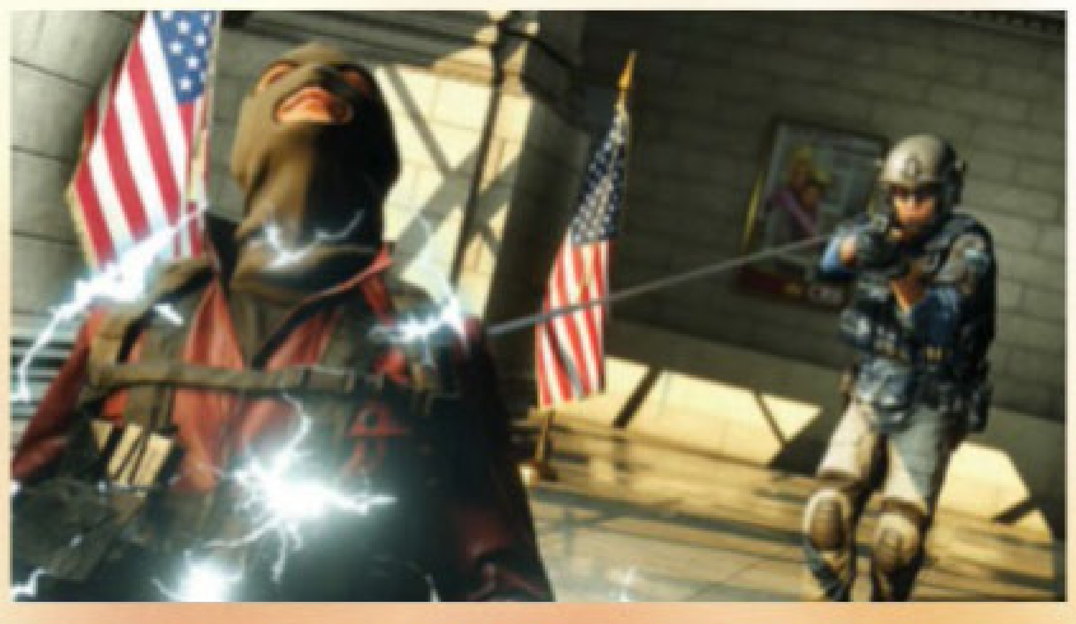
"One of the things we found most interesting when developing this game was the analogue we discovered when observing the similarities between TV and game development," explains Papoutsis. "For many years, people talked about games like movies. Thing is, films are like two and a half hours long… TV is actually more similar to games: an episode is more like a level, and a game takes place across multiple episodes, so when we discovered that angle, we started trying to figure out how TV starting and pacing really worked – that's where we brought in Calhoun. She really helped us understand that narrative structure, about how TV is paced out over multi-episode seasons.

"What we loved about working the TV angle was the 'Previously on…' and 'Next time…' parts. So, in our game, let's say you have to take a break, and you're not going to play it through in one sitting. When you're getting to exit, it prompts you with 'Next Time…' so you get that little teaser about what the next episode might be, *if you want*. You can bypass it for spoilers' sake if you'd rather not see it, though. That's something on TV that really works for me – it keeps me excited and makes me want to come back. One of the things in games that's always been challenging, too, is that if you take a break for a few days and come back later in the week, you can find it hard to remember what was going on. So, in *Hardline*, we've included a "Previously On…", which will include a recap on what you've done previously in the game."

The cast and crew of the game (both core and extended) come from a healthy cop show heritage, with a bonus casting of a *True Detective* actress in-game, too. Visceral means it when it says it's taking the 'cop fantasy' seriously, but that means more than just being a game where you can hop in a cop car, start the sirens blaring and tune into KRS One's *Sound Of Da Police* (well, you can do all that, and it feels *great*, but every shooter needs a little bit more depth than







Playing as a cop, you get access to a bunch of new tools to take down your enemies – the taser is something we can't believe we haven't seen more of in gaming.



The *Hardline* team, on location in what looks like the area the Dustbowl map is set, pose for the camera, armed with a ridiculous supply of deadly weaponry… they do know it's just a game, right?

that…) In that respect, it's interesting to rewind a little bit and revisit Visceral's history: where you notice that two of the studio's key staff – ex-general manager Glen Schofield and senior development director Michael Condrey – departed the studio in 2009 to set up Sledgehammer Games. You know, the team that made *Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare*. We asked Milham whether there was still any contact with the old Visceral employees, and whether he traded notes with Sledgehammer during the creative process on *Hardline*.

"So the answer is: yes and no," he laughs. "Game teams are big, and a lot of talented people have joined both studios since Glen [Schofield] and Mike [Condrey] formed Sledgehammer, and they have been doing an awesome job with what they're doing, and I think we've been doing a pretty good job with what we're doing. We're all still in touch, and there's really no…" Milham pauses and smiles briefly. "If there *is* any rivalry there, it's very friendly. It's good for games, it's good for the industry, and it's good for each other if we are both successful." Milham pauses again and seems to reflect, folding his hands in his lap and staring out the office window in the room we're chatting with him in.

"Actually, it's been really fun to have that *Dead Space* team grow and flourish into these two big, big projects. I think anybody that plays them will see how different the games are, and how complementary they are to each other, and how we've both grown separately and all that kind stuff. We're cheering for them and – I'd hope – they are cheering for us."

So where next for Visceral? Once *Battlefield* releases on 19 March, the studio will be providing the community with the help and tools it needs to cement the game as a solid fixture in the online multiplayer community. But a studio like Visceral always has more than one project in the works, and we've heard rumours floating around that Visceral took a keen interest in the *Star Wars* IP when EA came into the rights to the franchise last year…

"We love action games," Milham tells us, "always have, always will. You know, the third-person *Dead Space*-y type ones. The lessons that we've learned about uncompromising quality, [in game and] story, and the things we've learnt about Frostbite… all of those things will be in [our next] game."

> "Working on an IP as cool as Star Wars is really exciting, but what's more exciting is that they're really interested in leaning into our expertise from a game development perspective"

Papoutsis continues, "Getting the opportunity to work on an IP as cool as *Star Wars* is really exciting to all of us here, but what's *more* exciting working that closely with the licensor is that they're really interested in leaning into our expertise from a game development perspective – and even a story perspective, actually. We've brought in Amy Hennig, who's an amazing creative director and absolutely *amazing* from a narrative view, too, so we're really excited about what we can do in [Lucas'] universe. Lucas is really encouraging us to use our own story threads and not make a game based on the movies, but rather create something else within the *Star Wars* universe. That's really exciting for us."

So it seems Visceral has taken the time to come back down to earth, experiment with the FPS (to rapturous applause, if the six million players that took part in the open beta are anything to go by), talk to DICE about the intricacies of the phenomenal Frostbite engine, and is readying itself to go back into space for an adventure that could crown Visceral as the new master of the narrative-action game. Watch out, Naughty Dog, you've got a contender to your throne.

Visceral's Star Wars: What We Know So Far

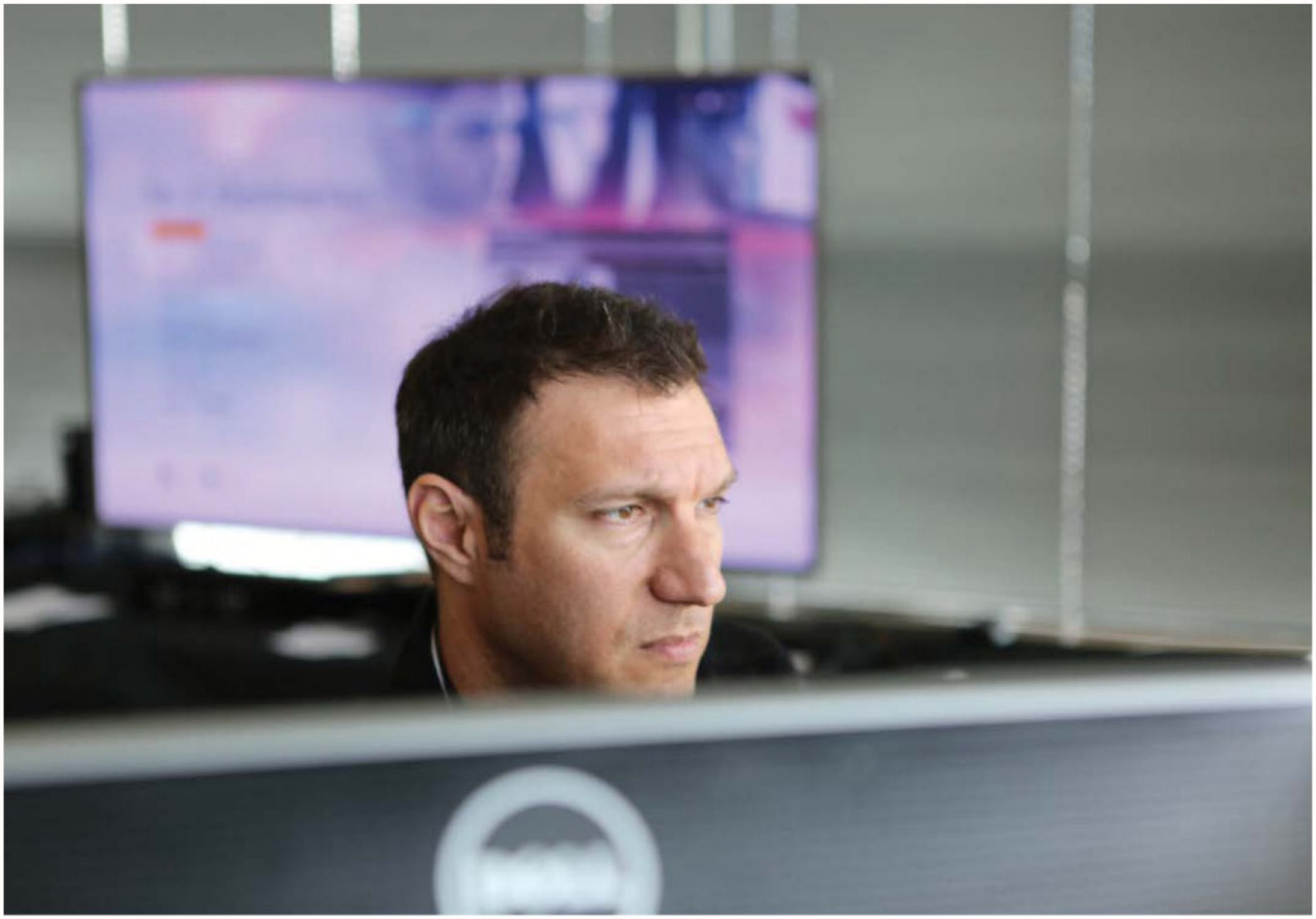
Visceral's as-yet-untitled *Star Wars* game is being kept firmly under wraps, but from various interviews and what we've managed to pick up on our worldly adventures, we've created a snapshot of everything we can safely bet on for Visceral's newest licence…

It's a brand new story…
…Papoutsis clearly stated that Lucas is looking to Visceral to utilise the rich universe *Star Wars* calls home to make its story. The fact the studio has brought in writer Amy Hennig, (*Legacy Of Kain* series, *Jak & Daxter* series, *Uncharted* series) means Visceral means business when it comes to the game's narrative

It's likely to be a third-person action game…
…since Papoutsis told us that's where Visceral feels most at home. The *Star Wars* universe's extensive arsenal would also feel great from a third-person view – the blasters and pistols would work as well as *Dead Space*'s line cutter did, and lightsabers? We need them

It'll be built in Frostbite…
…and why wouldn't it? It's one of the better-looking engines available to bigger studios, and by using the same engine as EA sister studio DICE, it means Visceral's game could share assets with *Star Wars: Battlefront*

It's likely to be set post-A New Hope…
…because it wouldn't make *too* much sense being set before that. After all, with a Boba Fett movie coming out, a Yoda movie coming out and a slew of other *Star Wars*-based properties set to line the shelves after December 2015, it'd make sense for Visceral to set its project in the new *Star Wars* universe



15 Years of Visceral

Steve Papoutsis, vice president and general manager at Visceral Games, talks to us about the studio's history, its design philosophy and where it's going next…

Your studio has had an interesting journey – can you talk about how you've moved from genre to genre, licence to licence?
Here at Redwood Shores, we've had a variety to work on different things; from the *Bond* licence to the *Lord Of The Rings* licence, and we even worked on the *Tiger Woods* games for a few years. What was interesting through the years was, well… we didn't have an identity, really. People saw us as an EA studio, but we really wanted to establish ourselves as a *proper* studio. Even the first *Dead Space* came out branded as an EA game, you know?



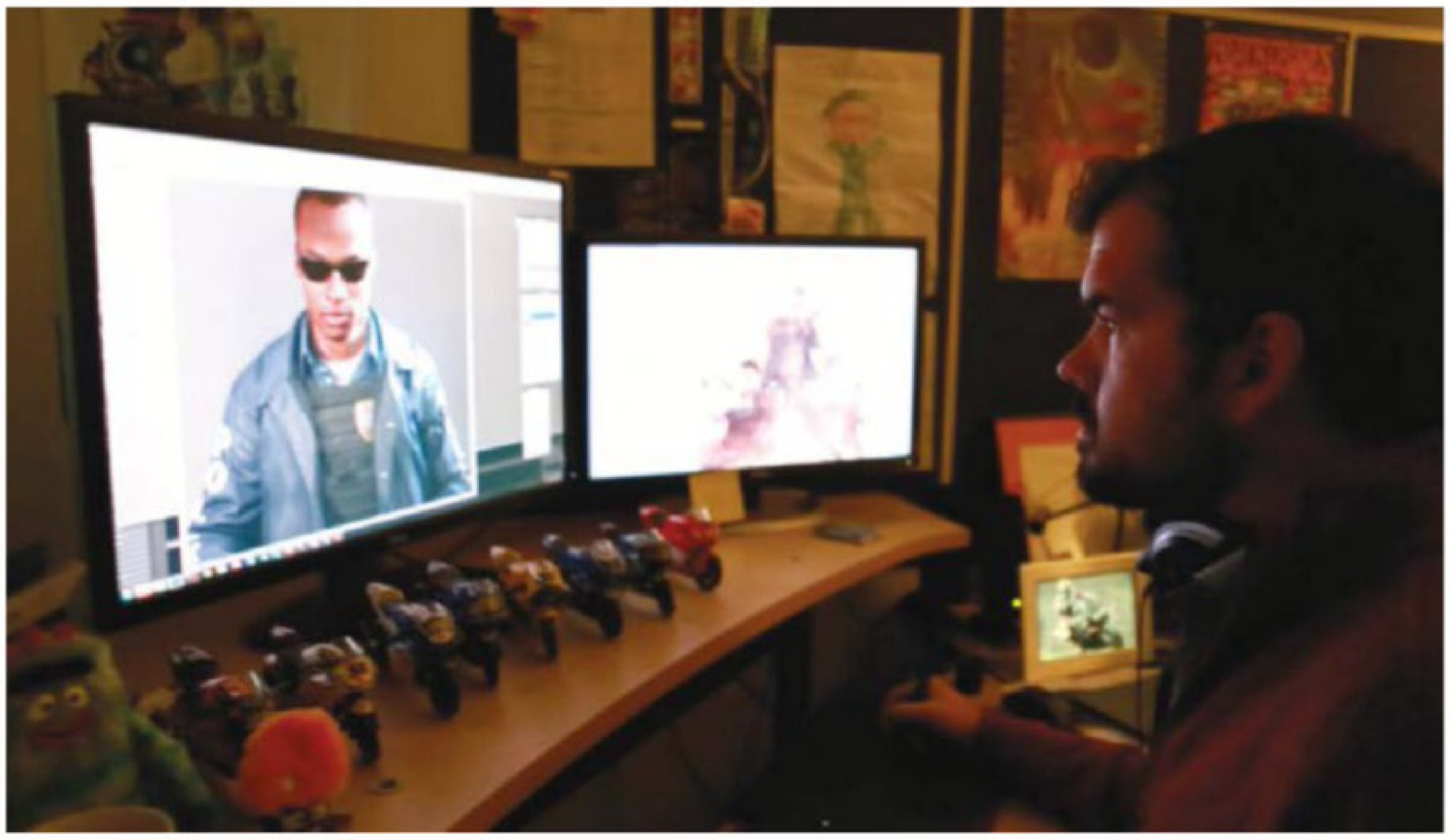
So *Dead Space: Extraction* was really the first Visceral game, and it was really exciting for us to have our own identity and be able to put a stamp on our games.

Was choosing Visceral as a name for yourself a statement or a hint towards your philosophy as a studio?
I think it was a bit of both – we were looking for a new name, a name that made sense to us, and 'visceral' had that. It's a word that's got these raw, emotional connotations, and it connects with players. So you can go back to our *Lord Of The Rings* games and see it there – obviously those games were based on the great stories [from the licence], but they were *also* very visceral in terms of their gameplay. It was just a natural fit, calling the studio that.

Visceral is known for its genre-hopping – which genre have you found to be the most fun to work in?
I think in game development, it changes

quite a lot. For me, it comes down to what I'm working on right now: in order for me to be really focused, I need to throw myself fully into whatever it is I'm doing. So right now, I *love* what we're doing with *Hardline* – it's a completely different animal, working on a first-person shooter. It's been a lot of work, though, we've had to learn a lot of stuff. But it's given us the opportunity to learn a lot, too – using our [past experience] to bring new things to the FPS genre that maybe people haven't tried before. It's pretty exciting.

In terms of my favourite, though? Well, the one thing that really gets me thinking, gets me excited about games, is the connection to the player and how you establish that. It doesn't matter how you do that, from a first- or third-person perspective, as long as you have interesting and fun gameplay mechanics and a great story, that's all you need.



"IN TERMS OF EA'S REPUTATION, I'VE BEEN HERE A WHILE, AND WE'VE SEEN IT GO UP, WE'VE SEEN IT GO DOWN… BUT RIGHT NOW WE'RE REALLY FOCUSING ON PUTTING PLAYERS FIRST"

Your studio worked with Glen Schofield and Michael Condroy for many years – how does it feel to be making the 'other' triple-A FPS alongside your old colleagues at Sledgehammer Games?
We're really happy that they're able to go and make their game and really drive the games industry forward – there are so many players that love the [*Call Of Duty*] franchise and I wish them all the best with that. It's interesting that we're working on a shooter right now, too, but we're really just focused on making the best game we can make, and giving our fans something that they'll enjoy. I don't necessarily see it as a rivalry [with *COD*] whatsoever.

You've been with EA quite a while now – through the hard times and now through its recovery – what's it been like working with the publisher over that time?
Well I've been with the company 15 years now, making videogames overall for about 20 years. Our industry has changed so much in 20 years, you know? With the internet coming in and people being able to connect with companies and push their opinions and thoughts through those channels… it's great that we allow people to get their opinions out there: I think it helps keep companies honest. We make games for players, and we want to focus in on their thoughts. But the challenge is sifting through all the feedback, and figuring out which pieces of feedback are consistent, and which pieces of information you want to focus on.

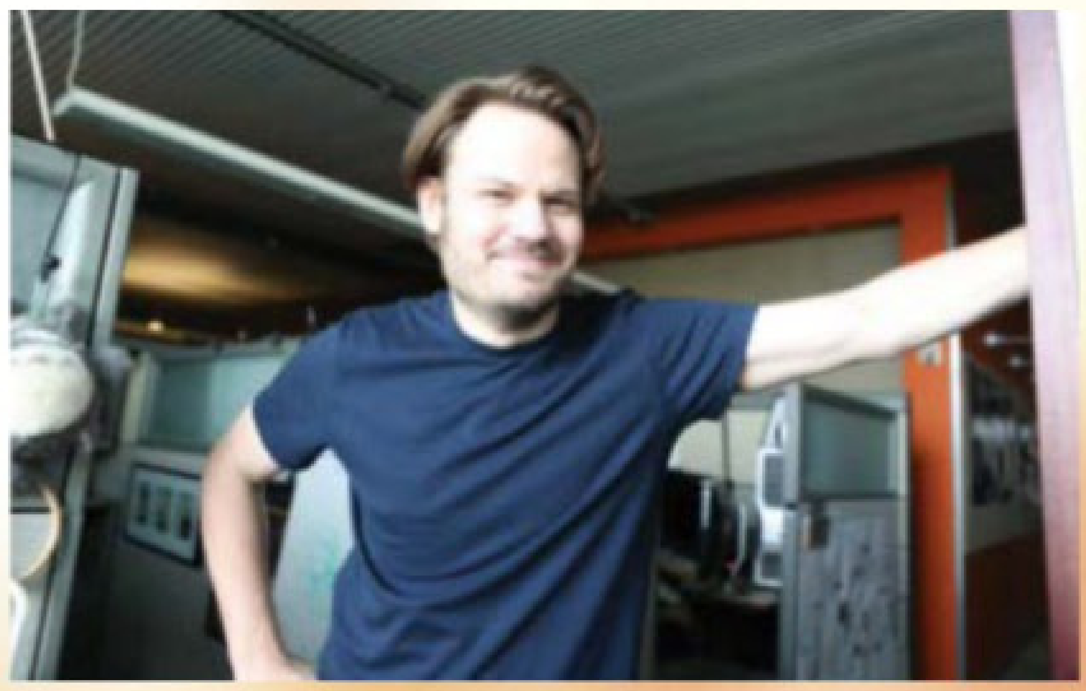
But in terms of EA's reputation, I've been here a while, and we've seen it go up, we've seen it go down… but right now we're really focusing on putting our players first and listening to our community so we can drive a more positive sentiment and show our players that we *are* listening and that we are taking their feedback into account so that we can make better games.

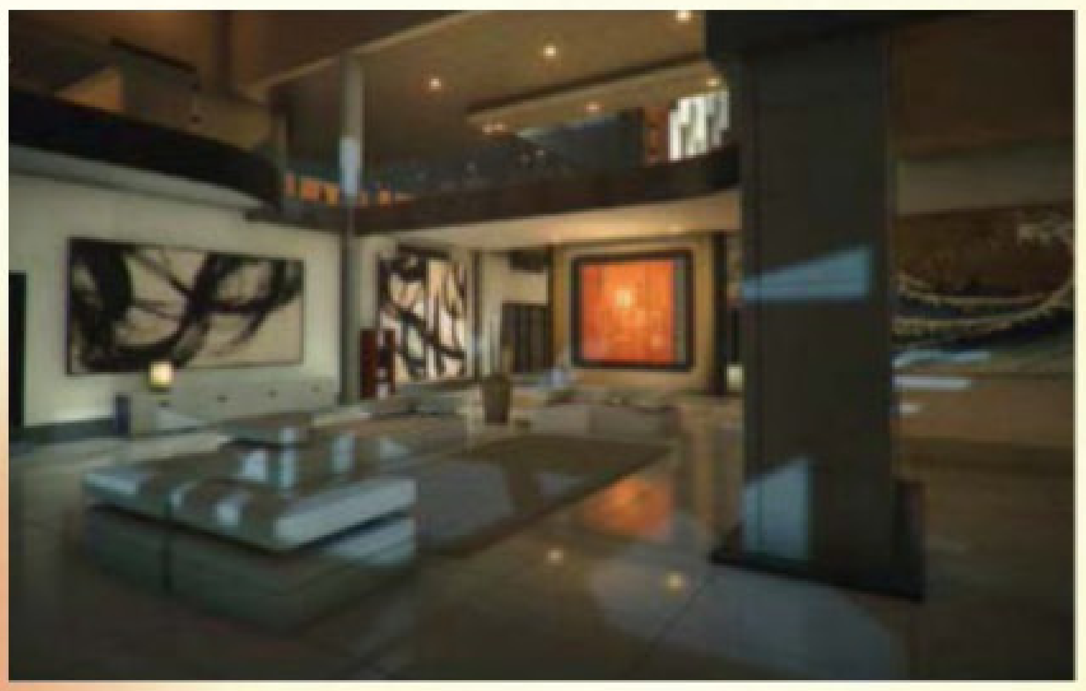
Have you ever been affected by the negative way people can respond to game elements or company policy online?
I think, ultimately, the most important thing when making games is to put your passion into the things you do, alongside embracing the people that are passionate about what you do. Engage, listen to your community – even though sometimes you might hear some harsh criticisms that might be the harshest thing you'll see on the internet… I just try to focus in on the fact that these are passionate people, that they really care about what we do. There aren't a lot of other industries where people comment quite so much on what you do, so if you put the right lens on it all, you can see the passion and the [devotion] fans have. You know, I use my own Twitter handle to interact with the player base – I respond where I can and I think it's important to see what's going on, on that level.

And do you ever think you'd return to *Dead Space*?
Many, *many* people here at Visceral have a warm spot in their heart for *Dead Space*, and right now we're busy with *Hardline* and… other things… but it's definitely something we'd love to look at again, and there's definitely a lot of interest internally for us to pick that up again at a future date.

■ THERE'S A LEVEL OF DEMOCRACY AT VISCERAL – FROM WHAT WE SAW OF BOTH PAPOUTSIS AND MILHAM, BOTH ARE KEEN TO TAKE ON BOARD COMMENTS FROM EVERY MEMBER OF STAFF.







REACHING FO



STAR CITIZEN HAS BEEN THRUST INTO THE LIMELIGHT AS ONE OF THE MOST ANTICIPATED SPACE ADVENTURES WE'VE EVER SEEN. GAMES™ SPOKE WITH CHRIS AND ERIN ROBERTS TO GET THE FULL STORY BEHIND ITS EXPLOSIVE RISE

If there's a single word that we would use to describe *Star Citizen* it would be ambitious. Ambitious in its goals, ambitious in its scope, ambitious in its vision, which has captured the imagination of a waiting fan base and ambitious in its approach to technology. "The game dovetails nicely with the whole theme of *Star Citizen* of space and going out there, because space is sort of ambitious, right?" poses Chris Roberts, the visionary behind *Star Citizen* and the creator of such games as *Wing Commander*. "What are the new frontiers? Let's go discover this new star front. On the PC and pushing this technology it's the same thing."

If you haven't kept up with the *Star Citizen* story then it's quite an extraordinary one. Launched on Kickstarter with the view of resurrecting the classic space exploration genre, the target was a modest $500,000, but through various outlets it exceeded $6.2 million. Cloud Imperium Games took the campaign and kept on pushing. To date, the team has crowdfunded almost $72 million. It's one of the greatest examples of fan-driven funding seen to date.

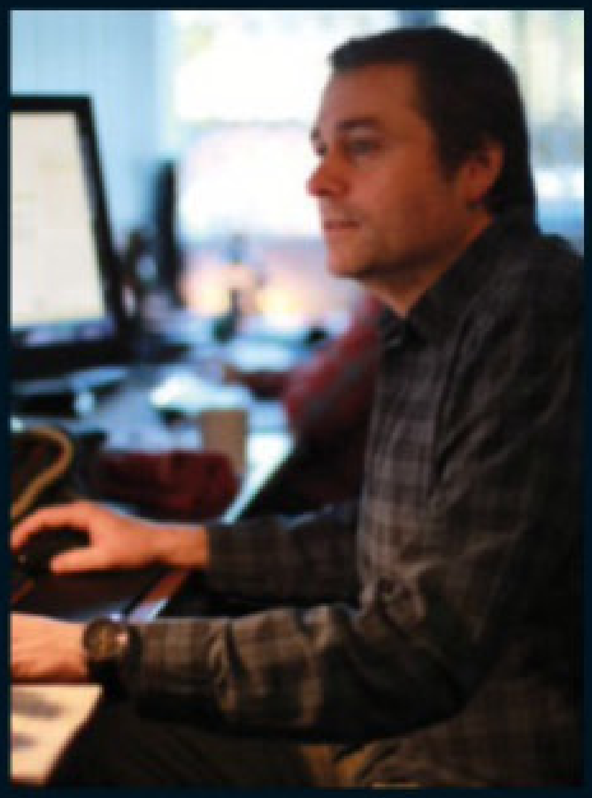
Roberts modestly tells us it was something they "fell into". "I didn't intend for it to be at the level we do it now, but we just ran with it and saw the energy we got at the early stages of the crowdfunding and that's kind of why we raised so much money. You've got this community and everyone's talking about it and everyone's excited and they're sharing stuff and most crowdfunding things just sort of say 'okay, thanks' and then they just go and work on stuff for a year or two years and then it comes out. It sort of feels like you had all this momentum and energy and excitement, why cut that off and not keep it going?" »

R THE STARS



But how was this amazing feat achieved? To get to the bottom of that we have to go back to how Chris Roberts chose to come back and what he brought with him after a decade away from games, making movies. "One of the key things you learn working on films is that they're very good at telling a highly realised story or emotional experience in a very small way," he explains, going on to show how the application of this idea directly impacted how fans have reacted to the game. "You can go to the forums and you can see people talking about what they're going to do, how they're going to venture out in their ship and they're living this life in their head and part of why they're doing that is that we've gone to an extreme. The ships are a good example of this; it's not that it's just a pretty exterior of a ship, it's a fully realised spaceship that looks cool on the outside, but also has all the bits working on the inside. It has the living quarters and the toilet and whatever. It has sleeping areas and you can use them all, so when you get inside the ship the details are there. You can easily project yourself that you're in this ship, venturing around this universe. So in your mind it's easier to put yourself in that place and have that initial reaction to that experience. It's small things and it's subtle things, but I think that it all adds up together to pull you into the universe."

Star Citizen is more than just a single game, which perhaps also goes some way to explain how it appears to have appealed to so many so quickly while it's still in development. There's the open sandbox persistent online universe aspect of the game, which will see over 100 systems to explore and various roles you can play out in the world. There's *Squadron 42*, the single-player component of the game, which will feature up to 70 missions and from which you will create the character you take into that online world. And then



Erin Roberts heads up the Foundry 42 development team in Manchester, handling *Star Citizen*'s single-player campaign mode.

there are the separate modules for co-op and multiplayer, elements of which have already been released for testing.

It's a massive game, but was it always intended to be such? $72 million goes a long way after all. "There are a fair amount of aspects to the game that have been greatly enhanced and expanded. There are always the obvious ones like we can just do more content, more locations and star systems and more ships, but also just the fidelity. When I was originally starting out I was kind of envisioning that I would have the space stuff, flying around, but when I was down on the planet it would be more like *Freelancer* or *Privateer* where you would sort of be on the planet and you would have a couple of locations. You could click on some people and try and sell some stuff, but then partly because we were in CryEngine and partly because we have the greater funds and backing, I was like, 'now we can make that stuff down on the planet fully immersive' and in the first-person engine, running around with that level of detail that you see in a triple-A first person game."

It goes far beyond just graphical fidelity though, as we found out speaking to Erin Roberts, brother of Chris and lead on *Squadron 42*. "[CryEngine] gives us a big advantage in the FPS side of things, although we are doing a bunch of work with the Moon Collider guys in Edinburgh who are doing the Kythera system for us, and they're doing a lot of the AI, so we're actually working with a new AI system," he reveals. "There's a lot of stuff that we want to do with the AI that needs a system that can handle these new situations."

Erin also worked on the *Wing Commander* series as well as *Privateer*, *Starlancer* and more recently on many of the *LEGO* titles through TT Fusion. He now heads up Foundry 42, the Manchester-based division of Cloud Imperium Games. "If

THE SIX PILLARS OF STAR CITIZEN

This is more than just a single game, it's a platform for multiple releases

PERSISTENT WORLD - STATUS: DESIGN

The overarching MMO aspect of the game is the ultimate goal of the various elements that have been released and tested so far. It's not expected to be finished for some time, but each new element released is a step towards the final product.

HANGAR - STATUS: READY TO PLAY

The storage facility for ships, the Hangar is currently available as a separate test module so you can walk around and explore many of the ships already available. It's a proof of concept of the first-person exploration and interaction we can expect.

SQUADRON 42 - STATUS: PRODUCTION

Named after the volunteer unit of the UEES (United Empire Of Earth Ship), this represents the prelude to the open world module and single-player component. It has a full story and features from virtually every element of the game.

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER - STATUS: PRODUCTION

Consisting of ground and Zero-G gameplay, this module is an extension of the Arena Commander module allowing for multiplayer and co-op tactical First-Person Shooter combat in a PvP and PvE setting.

ARENA COMMANDER - STATUS: READY TO PLAY

This is the dogfighting module of the game, making use of real world physics and zero gravity. It's already available to play and its gameplay will inform both the persistent world and *Squadron 42* portions of the game.

PLANETSIDE - STATUS: PRODUCTION

The social module of the game allows other players to visit your hangar and interact with the ships you hold there as well as featuring bars and shops for players to use as meeting spots for conversation and team-building.



You can expect dogfighting in *Star Citizen* to look and feel a lot like the action in *Battlestar Galactica*, with ships conforming to real physics and able to flip in motion to redirect attacks.

you walk up to someone and they don't want to talk to you, they might just turn away," he goes on to explain about the AI. "If you walk up to someone and look them in the eye, if they start talking to you and you look away or wander off they're going to say, 'hey dude, what's your problem?'. And if you keep on doing that they just say 'fine' and turn around and not want to talk to you. We want this level of fidelity in how you interact with people as well."

It's a much more naturalistic style of AI behaviour, highly sophisticated and advanced, but also demanding on the player, forcing them to embody the role that *Squadron 42* is imposing on them. "In *Squadron 42* specifically, you're in the military, so if the officer in charge is talking to you and you just start being an absolute idiot then he's going to warn you, obviously," Erin continues. "You don't do that and if you carry on messing around he'll put you in the brig."

The AI is a great example of how Cloud Imperium Games is pushing on all frontiers to make the ultimate space experience. Another is the use of gravity and zero/low gravity environments, as Chris Roberts tells us. "In the full persistent universe and *Squadron 42* the Zero-G parts of it will actually inform decent amounts of gameplay. You'll board another ship and you'll EVA over [Extravehicular activity, essentially leaving the spacecraft] and the ship won't have gravity because it's damaged or the people aboard the ship have turned the gravity off to thwart the plans of the people boarding. I think it's going to add a whole bunch of pretty fun and cool gameplay."

But just as important is that all these different elements of space flight, exploration, FPS combat, RPG narrative elements and more are integrated into one seamless system. You don't play as a ship and go into cut scenes elsewhere. You're always in first person, moving around and making choices. "When I worked on games like *Wing Commander* and *Privateer*, you kind of did all the action in space and when you landed there would maybe be a room that you walked into to have a conversation," Erin reminds us. "Whereas this was a whole dream of being able to seamlessly go into space, get out and walk around, meet people and it's all in this first-person style. That was what really excited me about the whole thing and I just felt that I had been doing one thing for seven or eight years, really enjoying it, but it felt like it was time to really push myself into something new. The technology is really there to do it now too. We can really create something that we just couldn't do back in the old days. Now we can go out and make this amazing fidelity, create a living, breathing world, which you just couldn't do back then." »

> "I'M PISSED OFF. I'VE GOT A $3,000 GAMING RIG AND THE ONLY THING THAT SHOWS IT OFF IS AN NVIDIA OR AMD GRAPHICS DEMO"



Throughout the game you'll be viewing the world in first person. You play as the pilot and can leave your chair to walk around your craft.



Many parts of *Star Citizen* are already available to play for backers of the game such as the Arena Commander dogfighting module and the Hangar.

THE UNLIKELY INSPIRATIONS BEHIND STAR CITIZEN

How a console exclusive fantasy game helped reignite Chris Roberts' imagination

It may come as a surprise but it wasn't *Mass Effect* or even *Eve Online* that connected with Chris Roberts as he began to flesh out his vision for *Star Citizen*, but the dark fantasy world of *Demon's Souls*. "In some ways it impacted how I was thinking about doing the multiplayer on *Star Citizen*, because I liked the model. It was sort of single-player enhanced by multiplayer. It was just kind of cool." For *Star Citizen* the inverse of this model is what Cloud Imperium Games has been working on. "We've got what I think is a multiplayer online model that gives you that sense of single-player empowerment or engagement. When you play a single-player game you feel like it's about you and when you play a traditional multiplayer game there are a lot of other people so it doesn't feel so personalised to you. By using the hybrid of what we're doing I feel like we're going to achieve both those things and coming back to the original point, I think *Demon's Souls* did a very good job of giving you that single-player experience with multiplayer added to it."





LEARNING FROM LEGO

Erin Robert's on the lessons learned from Traveller's Tales

My time at Traveller's taught me a lot. It made me a lot better at a lot of things. One of the things was on a production side we had to get really regimented and good at nailing timelines, because with the *LEGO* stuff you've got a lot of games out in quite a short period of time and so we had to be very good at breaking down what we needed, getting it organised and then making sure that tasks were managed. In terms of that operation side, that's been really good for the organisation, because a lot of that experience and a lot of the guys who have come on board - because there are a few people here from TT Fusion - that production methodology has helped a lot in terms of getting regimented.



The scope of the worlds Cloud Imperium is making would be spectacular from a team making a sandbox shooter, but this is an MMO with over 100 systems to explore. It promises to be epic.

Once again we come back to that word, ambitious. Cloud Imperium Games is putting together one of the largest, most power intensive projects we've seen in years. It's a PC exclusive game only possible on that platform and that's a fact that's not lost on the man behind the vision. "I mean, I'm pissed off," Chris Roberts tells us with a wry smile. "I've got a $3,000 gaming rig and the only thing that shows it off is an Nvidia or AMD graphics demo." It does feel like a long time since something really pushed PC hardware and reinvigorated that market, and Chris has his view on the last game that pulled that off. "I would always buy the new graphics card so I could push so many more polygons or whatever, but really when I started this I felt that since *Crysis 1* pretty much everything you got on the PC was essentially a port from a console game." And so he gambled with *Star Citizen* that he wasn't alone in that frustration.



Chris Roberts took a break from game-making to pursue a career in film, producing his own *Wing Commander* movie.

"There's probably a bunch of PC gamers who are pissed off about the fact they're getting hand me downs from consoles that are less powerful. So that was really the bet. The bet on *Star Citizen* was there's this community of people that want to see a space sim and a community of PC gamers who feel like no one is making games for them and those were the twin pillars we launched the campaign on."

"We're unashamedly going for it," adds Erin. "We just didn't want to do it unless we were going to go to that sort of level. The whole deal was that we didn't want to put constraints on it."

And now the technology is there to do it, through things like the CryEngine, but also through other forms of technology that allow an independent project like this to not only seek funding from around the world, but also divide up development across continents. "When I spent about a year on the prototype, in that case I didn't have the funds to bring 20 people together," Chris Roberts tells us. "We worked with people distributed around the world contributing to what I was putting together on the prototype. I felt like that worked fairly successfully and so that was one of the things where I said, 'well, we'll give it a try'. Now we've scaled much bigger than I was ever expecting us to scale, so now we have a lot of people and they're distributed. But we go where the talent is, so in the Frankfurt office we have a fair number of people who were at Crytek for a time and helped to build the engine but were leaving and wanted a change of pace, to work on something different. We had an opportunity to have them join us, because that kind of future-proofs our long-term technology. These people are world class."

The offices in LA (Chris Robert's home base), Austin, Frankfurt, and Manchester are supplemented by contractors adding further experience worldwide and it's all coordinated by Skype video conferencing each day as well as collaborative software like Confluence, JIRA and visual effects software Shotgun. Through these means each of the teams is able to keep up to date with the others, offer feedback and suggestions and stay on the same page. It may sound complex, and it is, but both of the Roberts brothers believe the compartmentalisation of the game is helping get the best from each part.

"If you think about *Star Citizen* and everything that needs to get done, it's pretty overwhelming and you go, 'oh my God, how are we ever going to get this done?'," Chris admits. "But if you're just focusing on the FPS combat and you've got two levels right now and you're getting them working really well, that's more mentally containable." While Erin admits it's not always perfect it does mean more work can get done faster. "We can be really effective where the UK will finish working here in the evening and we then have a hand-off email to the US saying, 'this is everything we've done, this is where we're up to', when we're working on shared stuff and then they'll take it and start working on that," he explains. "They'll maybe solve some issues we couldn't and come back and say 'this is where we're up to', and hand it back to us. We can almost get 24-hour development going and it works really well."

The other great focus comes from staggering its releases and having two clear pieces of the puzzle to build for; the broad *Star Citizen* persistent universe, which may still be a couple of years away from completion and the single-player campaign of *Squadron 42*, described by Erin and Chris as being everything they would have wanted a new *Wing Commander* to be if they had returned to that franchise. "*Squadron 42* and the persistent universe are kind of the customers and then all the different pipelines are working towards getting the stuff in," Erin explains. "There's a lot of excitement about what we're trying

"WE GO TO WHERE THE TALENT IS, SO IN THE FRANKFURT OFFICE WE JUST HAVE A FAIR NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO WERE AT CRYTEK FOR A LONG TIME"

COUNTING THE STARS

Some of Star Citizen's impressive numbers

$71,949,104 made through crowdfunding

744,328 backers

617,433 players of Arena Commander

10 crewmembers in largest IDRIS-M and IDRIS-P frigates in open world

300+ ships in total



- TRADE & INDUSTRY **20%**
- EXPLORATION **10%**
- COMBAT OPERATIONS **25%**
- PRIVATEERS **15%**
- TBC **30%**



» to build in terms of detail and fidelity in everything we're doing and this year we're planning to just start showing people all that promise and get the ground-based FPS stuff out there. We also want to get the social module out there so people can walk around their hangars and visit people in their hangars and visit the cities and so forth."

And *Squadron 42* isn't far away either. While it sounds as if final release plans are still being discussed, we could be venturing into the military role-playing experience before the end of 2015 and it will be a finished product. "When that comes out it will be heavily tested and it will go out as a finished project whereas typically with the other stuff we want to put it out there, get community feedback, and because *Squadron 42* is using a lot of the ground-based stuff and space stuff and so on, all those elements should be really good, so all we're putting out that's new is the story and certain elements of content, which people have seen and should hopefully work pretty well," Erin adds.

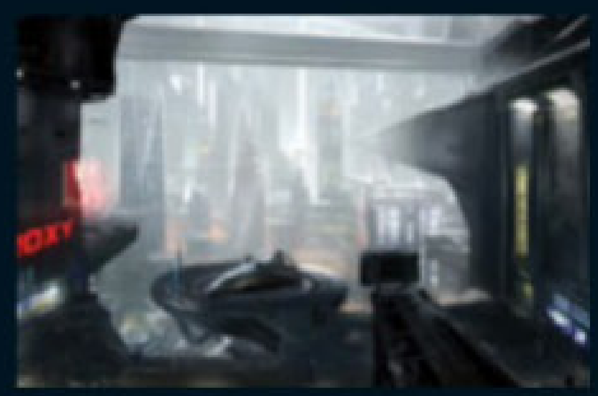
Meanwhile the persistent universe is exploring the balance of a multiplayer experience with a single-player layer. "In general I think our blend of PvE to PvP is going to be about 80 to 20," Chris Roberts reveals. "Players will make up about ten per cent of the universe and the rest will be AI, so what that means is there are lots of opportunities for a player that if you're fighting some AI pirates you'll have a chance to get some victories. So even if you're not a particularly good player, you can still feel like you're a bit of a badass. And if you're more into the PvP stuff, there are areas you can go to so that's a very distinct design that we have."

This breakdown was decided upon in part to limit too much griefing of other players online, but also because it allows the team to craft moments in the online world that can really draw the players in. "If you go down a dark alleyway when you land on a planet and talk to your black market contact to get a shady mission, a couple of muggers jump out, try to mug you and then you've got to fight them off," is one example offered by Chris. "It's not necessarily in the greater scheme of things the most amazing confrontation or the most difficult thing to do, but having locations that you can land and interact on, that are alive and potentially dangerous, makes the universe feel more expansive."

What's more you can band together in the persistent world, form mega-organisations, work as a lone wolf or just play together with a few friends to pilot a multi-person crewed vessel. As a pirate, fighter, mercenary, trader or something in-between, you can take your military-trained character from *Squadron 42* and play as you please. Separate to this will be the ability to play back through single-player set piece engagements with friends in an instanced co-op mode, parts of which are already being shown off.



■ When you consider the scale of game being made, Star Citizen is doubly impressive for having such gorgeous graphics and fine detail.

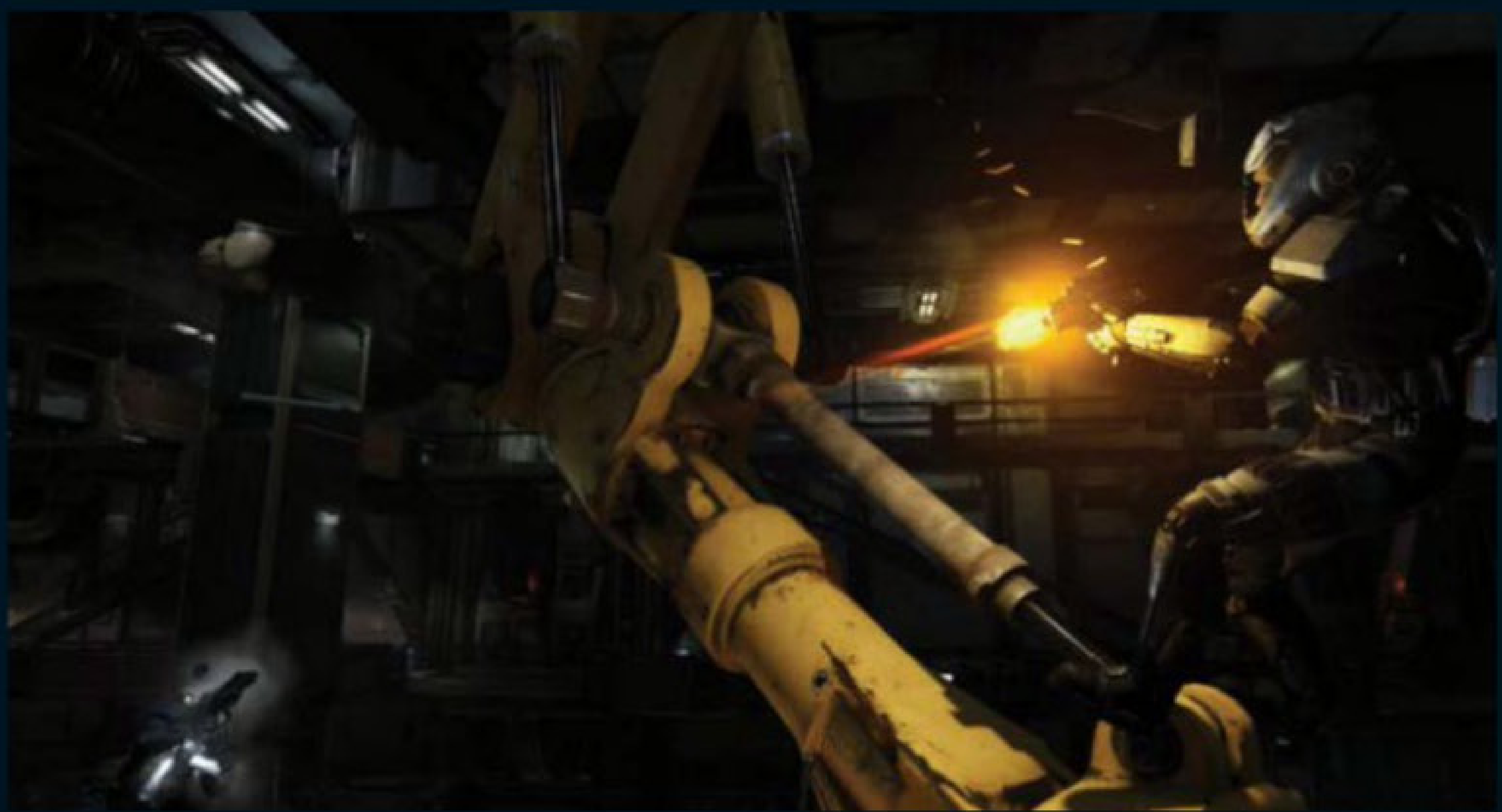


■ For fans of Wing Commander, single-player is described as everything Chris Roberts would have wanted to do with the series.

And that's the final element of what's made *Star Citizen* so successful; the team's willingness to share and engage the community. "The beauty of what we do is we can just keep putting stuff out there, getting feedback and making it better and better for everybody. It's fantastic for *Squadron 42*, because we know that when we release it the space combat is going to be really good, because we've had all this feedback, we've gone out, we've made changes, we've had lots of time to balance and we can really give you a great experience when you get into the game."

It was another PC gaming phenomenon that inspired this way of releasing and creating a fan base for *Star Citizen* as well as an older title of Roberts' that was still showing life after so many years. "I saw what *Minecraft* did and I was pretty impressed with the way at the very early stages there wasn't much to it, there was just one guy and he said, 'here it is for alpha', and he carried on building it," Chris Roberts reveals to us. "Just the way that it built and connected with the community I think was pretty impactful for me. I saw also what we had on the other side in terms of *Freelancer* mod community that had built up. The mod tools were put in towards the end, but really the mod community kept *Freelancer* alive. Microsoft published it and pretty much abandoned it right afterwards and when I went back and looked at the *Wing Commander* fan sites, *Wing Commander* news and people are making their own versions in the *Wing Commander* fiction, there was still this passionate base."

"THIS IS GOING TO BE MY WORLD OF WARCRAFT FOR THE NEXT X NUMBER OF YEARS"



From this point allowing backers an intimate level of access to how it was being developed and expanded, became the obvious route for *Star Citizen*. "How often do gamers feel like they can play something and they're feedback actually makes a difference?" Chris asks. "Sure, you can play the beta of *Battlefield* or a few other triple-A games before they go out, or *Halo* or something, but it's so close to the final release date that nothing can really effect it, so maybe it's a stress test or just the modern version of a demo before you're actually going to buy it, but the people who play it know that this thing's coming out in like a month's time."

With the emotional bond backers have already formed with *Star Citizen*, this is more than just a few beta testers giving a thumbs up or down on a game they may or may not play. These players are in it for the long haul and that's something Chris Roberts appears immensely proud of. "For most of our backers, they're not looking at this as something that they're going to play for a week. 'This is something that I'm going to spend many years adventuring around in, so I want it to be done right, I want it to be done with a great level of ambition, because this is going to be my *World Of Warcraft* for the next X number of years'. That's the sense that I get anyway, not to put words in people's mouths, but that's the feeling I get when I talk to people."



CHILLOUT GAMES
we value your games
www.chilloutgames.co.uk/SellGames.aspx
review centre
since 1st 2005
We Pay:
£26.60
£142.85
£36.00
£14.42
£15.87
£31.08
-RAPID PAYMENT
-GREAT PRICES
-FREE COURIER
WANTED
SECOND HAND
win prizes
facebook
Prices valid as at 2nd March 2015. Prices subject to change on a daily basis. Chillout Games and retro-games.co.uk are trading names of Chillout Games Ltd. Prices are for shop credit - 12% more than PayPal. T&Cs at www.chilloutgames.co.uk.



retro gaming cables.co.uk
Quality audio video cables made in Great Britain
RGB SCART Cables available for:
• Sega Mega Drive 1 & 2
• Nintendo SNES (PAL & NTSC)
• SNK Neo Geo AES & CD/CDZ
• BBC Acorn Micro
• Sinclair ZX Spectrum + 128k, +2 & QL
• Atari STF, STE & STFM
• Amstrad CPC 464
• Various Arcade Jamma Superguns (Sigma, Pana, CMVS etc)
Plus many more on our website
RGB SCART cable key features:
• Vast improvement over traditional RF, composite video and s-video
• Pixel clear RGB video
• Improved sound quality
• No more tuning
• SCART TV plug & Play
• Compatible with up-scaling units i.e. Framemeister Mini XRGB
Buy direct from www.retrogamingcables.co.uk/store
FREE UK Delivery

BEHIND THE SCENES OF EVERY GTA

HOW ITS STUNNING SOUNDTRACKS WERE MADE

20 YEARS WORKING WITH THE HOUSERS

Exposed

Rockstar Games' former audio mastermind Craig Conner speaks about his time with the company, his creative process and the Houser brothers



"THE CONTROVERSY OF GTA1 MAKES ME LAUGH. IT WAS IN NO WAY REPLICATING REAL LIFE"

So how did you go about landing your job at DMA Design?
I owned a Tascam 16 track recording studio at the beginning of the Nineties and was living the dream, recording my own stuff, producing Scottish bands and working freelance in radio production, but the reality was that I wasn't making that much money – I had to take on an office job to pay the bills. A colleague of mine at the time noticed an ad for DMA – they were looking for musicians. I thought what the hell, it's a full-time job making music and noises. I got an interview and started a month later…

Right from the start of development, was the plan always to do in-game radio stations in *Grand Theft Auto*?
As far as I can remember, yes. We were all very concerned that it would involve the music stopping and starting when the player exits/enters a car, but that wasn't the case; it wasn't really an issue at all. It added to the experience I think. We didn't really plan to have DJs; we only touched on that briefly in *GTA1*. The spoof commercials and idents didn't really arrive until *GTA2*.

You composed the now classic rap theme song to *GTA1, Gangster Friday* among many others. Creatively, how do you successfully approach such a diverse array of genres?
I'm not sure if we successfully pulled off all the genres, but we gave it a good go. We just listened to music that was current at the time and tried to tap into that. I don't know if that turned out to be a homage or a parody to each genre- you decide. I teamed up with rapper Johnny Wilson to produce the hip hop tracks. I wont mention his credited name as its probably not very PC these days… but diehard fans will know who I mean! When I wrote *Gangster Friday* I was in the studio in Dundee rapping into my Dictaphone trying to be all "gangster". I was a raver at the time with bleached hair and enlarged pupils so I wasn't very gangster. I wasn't sure if it was even possible for me to write hip-hop beats as I'd never done it before, but thank fuck Johnny came into the studio at DMA. I quickly made up a vocal booth using some cheap duvets, chucked him in it and said "BRING IT" and he did. I laugh at the track when I hear it now. I much prefer the second hip hop track that we co-wrote *This Life*. The third hip hop track was pretty awful, it turned out like a 'Snap – I've got the power' rap, oh dear…

From all the tracks that have been created in-house throughout the series, which one would you say was your favourite, and how did it come about?
I think it would have to be *Train* – it appeared on *GTA Liberty City Stories*. The whole track was literally written in ten minutes with my good friend Julie Wemyss. I love the energy in the chorus. Coincidently, Julie visited me in Edinburgh from Aberdeen and wrote the lyrics on the train journey down in around 20 minutes! I sent Julie some chords the night before and we managed to write the entire track, record the instruments and vocals in only five hours – we went out that night, had a bit too much to drink, then I mixed the whole track the following day in a few hours. Quick spontaneous music always turns out to be the best.



Rockstar's most ambitious game to date, *GTA V* also raised the bar in terms of game audio design.

What's your take on the original *GTA1* controversy?
The controversy of *GTA1* makes me laugh. It was a 2D top-down pixel-tastic fun game that was in no way replicating real life. During the development we didn't really think that it was controversial – we simply wanted to make a game that was fun. One thing's for sure, the press frenzy certainly got the game noticed… proving the point that there's no such thing as bad publicity, I guess, unless of course you're Katie Hopkins…

***GTA III* was the first in the series to utilise real world music. Were you always hoping the series would eventually move towards this?**
Sam and I always wanted to bring real world tracks into *GTA*. It made complete sense to us. People assumed that I was »



> "I WAS A RAVER AT THE TIME WITH BLEACHED HAIR AND ENLARGED PUPILS SO I WASN'T VERY GANGSTER"

against the idea and that I didn't want this to happen, saying things like "But now you won't get your own music in the game!" but I never viewed it like that at all, as I always looked at the bigger picture. The games were growing on such an unimaginable scale that I was spreading myself thinly with all the dialogue and sound design as well as music – we were also licensing tracks that no one could have produced in house i.e. Double Clef FM and Flashback 95.6 FM. As for *Vice City*, it would have been impossible to write an entire in-house soundtrack that would pay homage to the Eighties.

● *GTA III*'s radio stations spilled out into the game world, with billboards promoting what stations were on offer to the player.



More recently in the series there have been no fictional bands. From the point of view of both a composer and gamer, how do you feel about this?
By the time that *GTA IV* was in development, my role had changed quite considerably. As well as managing the music department at North, I was working on several other Rockstar titles. Mastering all the radio dialogue and music was a full-time job on its own so there simply wasn't the time to write a score too. Also, the critical acclaim that the *Vice City* soundtrack received meant that it was obvious we had made the right move with licensed music. And how the fuck could we compete with those huge Eighties classic tracks? Anyway, how do you know that there *aren't* any hidden fictional bands in *IV* and/or *V*...?

Unlike many gaming figureheads in our industry, Sam and Dan Houser keep to themselves quite a bit. From knowing them since the mid-Nineties, what's your overall impression of them and what's it like working with them?
I'm not sure that I would have stayed in the games industry if it weren't for Sam and Dan to be honest. *GTA* is not only a success because of the gameplay, I think it's their obsessive attention to detail that's made it the phenomenal success that it is today. It's all the cultural references, characters, music, fashion, media, art and pop culture that they tap into for each title that makes *GTA* what it is. That's the kind of stuff that excites me too, so when they came on board it felt like we could really take *GTA* to the next level. There was no expense spared with research and that's the shit that's important to me. If you're going to do something, do it right and make it as authentic as possible and to the best of your ability – that was a work ethic that we all shared.

Don't get me wrong; making *GTA* nowadays is no easy gig. It's a huge assault course that requires a team of hundreds. The Housers' focus and vision never falls during the entire development from start to finish. I loved working with Sam, we were both really excited about all aspects of the game, and going through the music tracks was a real highlight of mine. It was so much fun spending time blaring out music together during the final selection of tracks for each *GTA* – to the point where our ears were almost bleeding. Sam's musical knowledge is something I have a huge respect for.

Can you give us an insight into the process of taking a collection of tracks and audio and incorporating them into the final product?
The first stage in the process would always be to identify the style of each station. We would always have a few tracks that would be definite keepers, so would just build on that. We would add, remove, snog marry and avoid tracks right up until the very last minute, literally the day before final submission – it was pretty exciting.

We'd always go to huge lengths to make a station as authentic as possible by really researching the genre, respecting it and getting advice from people in the know. Most of the people that we got advice from would be a star in that genre – they'd usually end up being the DJ for that station. Thinking back, we were lucky to have had some amazing DJs throughout the series.

Once the station was refined, Sam would name it himself, then the DJ and



Julie Wemyss

GTA musician/vocalist on working with Craig

I met Craig at just 17 – he was looking for a guitarist, I'd played guitar and sung since the age of 12. Craig asked me to join his band. That was the start of some of the best times – playing live, recording songs and learning about song writing. After a few years of different bands, we decided to record our own album just the two of us.

By the time we tackled our second album we were called Conor & Jay, and Craig owned and ran a 16-track recording studio. We created the album *Cafe* there and developed a strong songwriting partnership. My strengths were melodies, lyrics, guitar and harmonies, Craig was more about the production, arrangements, sound, bass and drums. I had different influences to Craig but somehow we met in the middle.

Alongside that album, Craig was offered the position at DMA in Dundee. This opened opportunities for me as a singer/songwriter, working on radio jingles and songs. I think *Change* was the most popular song on *GTA III* but we've written many songs together for the series. I penned under different names so we could experiment with fictional bands. Creatively it was great to be given a genre – I feel comfortable writing in most styles, and Craig is a creative force that inspires me. I'm excited about his new venture, and I'm looking forward to writing with him on future projects.

Will Morton

Former Rockstar senior sound designer on working with Craig

I've worked very closely with Craig now for over 12 years. I joined Rockstar North at the start of 2002 and was thrown in at the deep end having *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* as my first project. Since then we've worked together on more *GTA* games than I can count, and a load of other titles Rockstar Games published too.

In that time we travelled to New York and Los Angeles many times to direct and record the actors for *Grand Theft Auto*. The first time I went to America with Craig was to direct actors for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. I'd worked in studios before, but never handling as many actors as this. Craig took me under his wing and showed me the ropes directing in such high-pressure sessions.

Working with Craig at Solid Audioworks is great – Craig and I have our own separate studios where we can really get our heads down and focus on tasks specific to each of us, and we then have a larger shared studio where we work together when it comes to the creative direction of a project or sharing mixing duties (two sets of ears are better than one!). We know each other so well that we work brilliantly as a team, but we know we can trust each other's skills implicitly when we need to work alone, and I think that's something you can only get by working together for years as we have.



"THE CAST OF ACTORS THAT WE MANAGED TO GET WAS PRETTY AMAZING AT THE TIME TOO – WE REALLY FELT LIKE WE WERE THE DOG'S BOLLOCKS!"

» idents were recorded and that's what brought it all together. When that was complete, I'd begin the mastering process. This would always be a mammoth task as the main job was to make all of the radio sound consistent (like mastering a compilation album but x 30 with lots of different styles of music) at the same time each station needed to maintain it's authenticity. In real world radio, every station sounds unique depending on budget, profile and audience numbers. I would obsess over this and try to recreate the real world radio sound in our game.

The biggest controversy Rockstar has faced has been with *Manhunt* series. How do you view the media backlash?
I don't really want to get tangled up in the *Manhunt* controversy. All I'll say is that a lot of very talented people worked very hard to make *Manhunt* what it was. It was such a shame that the controversy overshadowed what we'd created – a great horror/slasher game in my opinion. I think I can speak for most of my friends at Rockstar when saying that our main focus was always to make great games that we wanted to play – if that's controversial, then so be it!

After almost 20 years, why leave Rockstar now?
Grand Theft Auto V's success was phenomenal and the amount of awards that it received was unbelievable. I'm so proud of all our achievements at Rockstar so it was far from an easy decision to leave, but it was definitely the right one. From a creative point of view I needed to make a change and try new things. There are so many other things that I still want to do and explore with Solid Audioworks, all of which wouldn't be possible if I committed to any future Rockstar titles.

I do miss the music team from North though [Lindsay, Fraser, Becky and Keith]. We worked very well together and managed to have a lot of fun at the same time. Laughing on the job, and at ourselves is really important to me, especially whilst working on a challenging project. I'm a great believer in one of Richard Branson's work ethic quotes "Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to." By having a good working environment, you get the best out of people – the music team at North are a very talented bunch individually as well as collectively.

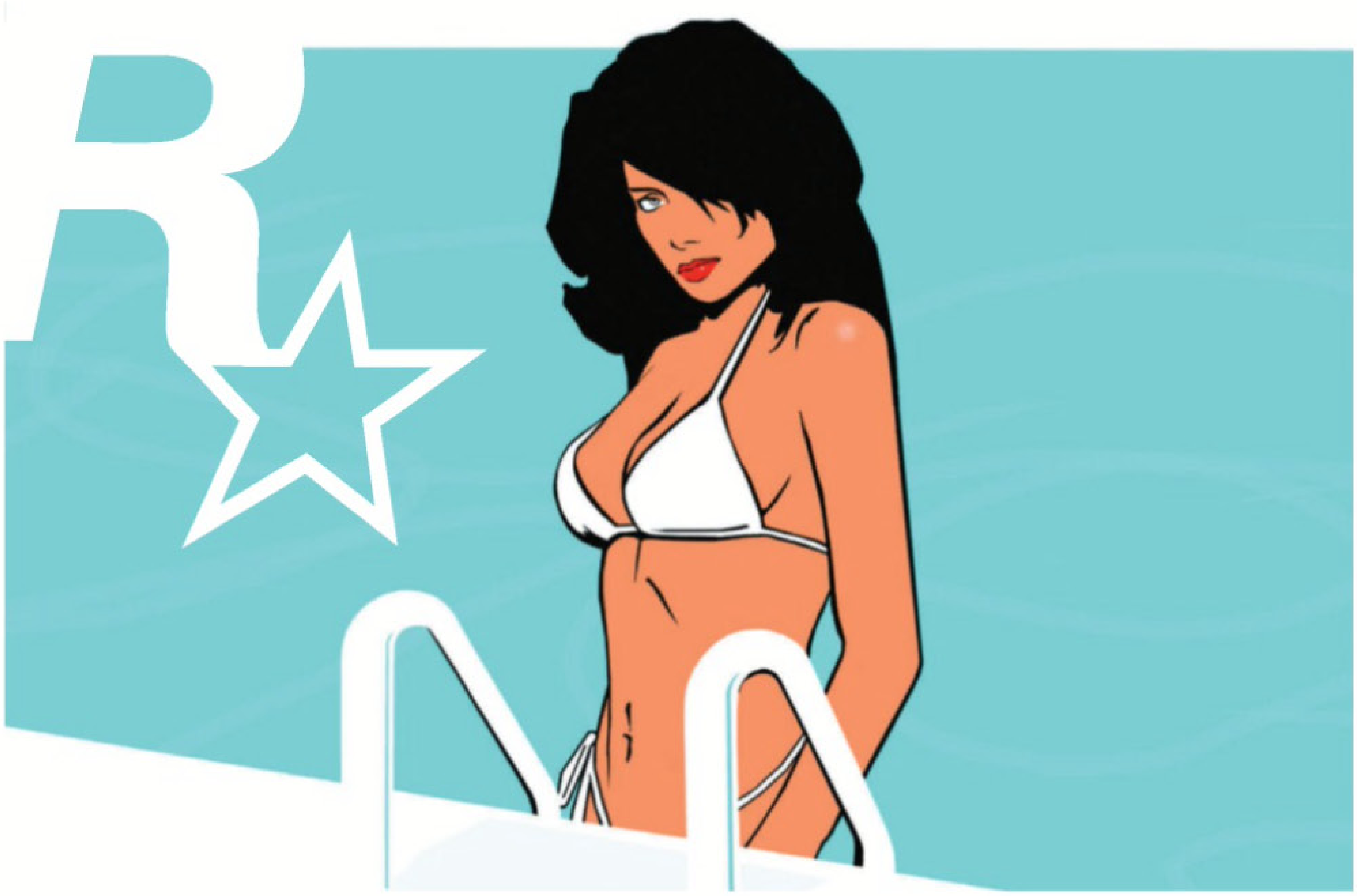
● The *Manhunt* series caused an uproar in the media regarding gaming violence, which sadly overshadowed the dark brilliance the series achieved.











So your new venture is Solid Audioworks, an audio company you set up with fellow ex-Rockstar audio designer Will Morton…
Game development constantly evolves. Technology changes all the time; games get more complex with each new platform. Will and I have over 30 years experience in game audio and we've worked on pretty much every platform over the last two decades. Between us we've gained a wealth of knowledge and expertise both technically and creatively. To add to that we also have a large team of talented audio designers, VO artists, programmers and composers we can pull in to work on bigger titles with us.

How does working as a freelancer differ from working with Rockstar?
The biggest change for us has been the spectrum of the projects that we're now working on. We're lucky to be in a position where people in the industry know who we are. We've done the triple-A thing for years, but are changing that right now by doing *Lost Ember*. We will return to do an triple-A soon, but to be completely honest, the size of a game, whether its large or small, doesn't phase us, as long as it's a game we want to play, then we're in.

What's your dream project?
My dream/fantasy project would be working on a next-gen psychological ultra-violent dark horror game (based on true events of course!) – co-writing the soundtrack with Kate Bush and Nick Cave, making all the gory SFX using fruit and meat (as we did on *Manhunt*) to get disgusting fleshy sounds that make your skin crawl. Having the lead characters voiced by Reece Shearsmith, Steve Pemberton, Mark Wootton and Vicki Pepperdine. I'd have the story penned by Julia Davis, Chris Morris and Charlie Brooker. The art concept would be by Ian McQue and directed by James Wan. Not too big an ask, I think…

Which Rockstar game did you have the most fun working on?
It has to be *Vice City* – it was so exciting researching the soundtrack and hearing all those amazing Eighties tracks that I'd grown up listening to actually getting cleared/licensed to appear in our game. No developer had ever had the privilege of having access to artists like Michael Jackson, Dave Lee Roth, Herbie Hancock Roxy Music, Kate Bush, Blondie, Hall & Oates, Sigue Sigue Sputnik to name just a few. If that wasn't enough, the cast of actors that we managed to get was pretty amazing at the time too – we really felt like we were the dog's bollocks! At the time it was still a very small development team – it was a great close-knit vibe in a tiny studio – the energy and excitement after the success of *GTA III* was amazing. We managed to deliver *VC* in just nine months, from start to finish – and about eight of those months we spent in the pub, legless most nights, designing the game. Happy days!

And what game are you currently working on?
As Solid Audioworks, Will Morton and I wanted to focus on the fundamentals – something fresh with a small team, a great idea, brilliant story and most important of all, great gameplay.

We've been fortunate enough to meet the perfect team who are doing just that – a bunch of young, eager and very talented folks at Mooneye Studios in Hamburg. The game that the team at Mooneye is working on is *Lost Ember* – an episodic exploration adventure set in a Mayan-like world. *Lost Ember* tells the story of a lone wolf with the mysterious skill to control other animals to rekindle the beauty of a forgotten culture's monumental relics, all set in vibrant beautifully crafted forests and jungles.

This is a whole new world to us, quite literally. Our art director Maximilian Jasionowski's vision has created something rather unique, and we are so happy to bring our experience to this energetic new team. We're already exploring some new technology for handling surround sound – to complement this we'll write an all-together very unusual interactive score.

Since we set up Solid Audioworks we've spent a lot of time making our own bespoke SFX library, it will be great to implement all the natural sounds we've developed in to *Lost Ember*. Watch this space.



Craig's first post-Rockstar Games endeavour is *Lost Ember*, a title that is a far cry from the streets of *San Andreas* and *Liberty City*.



Craig Conner's Greatest Hits

THROUGH HIS 20 YEARS WITH ROCKSTAR GAMES, CRAIG CONNER LOOKS BACK ON A SELECT FEW OF HIS PAST WORKS



With *Red Dead Redemption*, a unique game environment offered up new audio challenges and opportunities for Craig and the team.

Red Dead Redemption

Released: 2010 **Platform:** PS3, Xbox 360

I wrote an original interactive concept piece for *Red Dead Redemption* – we used that as a foundation to build on. I took inspiration from the film *The Proposition*. It made sense for Woody Jackson and Billy Elm to record the score in their studio in LA – the style was something they could produce easily and they had access to the cream of the crop in terms of LA musicians and instruments – there's no way we could have produced that authentic Western sound in our Edinburgh studio.

The guys produced tons of tracks and I would strip them all back, mix and master each multi-track and build them back up as interactive stems. Looking back it was rather easy getting the score to complement the game – we weren't competing with a noisy city like *GTA*. In contrast, *Red Dead Redemption* was a natural-sounding environment, and so the music always came through well. I remember getting one of the first tracks back from Bill and Woody then hearing it in the game while riding a horse – it felt like I was in a movie with panoramic visuals.

Grand Theft Auto V

Released: 2013
Platform: PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PC

Introducing an interactive score, alongside the trademark radio to the *GTA* world is something that I view as a great achievement. The development was tough and frustrating as there was an army of people working on it worldwide – but I never lost focus, I knew it was going to be special. Similarly to *Red Dead Redemption*, I wrote a concept interactive track for the score and then had to present Edgar Froese (Tangerine Dream) with my work. That was probably one of the most nerve-wracking things that I've ever done. There I was in the studio with this legend whose work I'd admired for decades and I'm saying things like "So if you could just write it like this and if you could do this part like that". Who the fuck did I think I was!? But Edgar was nodding his head to the track and smiling, so I think I got away with it. It's a hell of a task getting any composer to write with the limitations that an interactive score applies to the whole process – luckily I got on great with Edgar and it all turned out well.





The move to an interactive score for *GTA V* made this one of Conner's greatest challenges.



● *Vice City*'s Eighties soundtrack cemented the use of real-world music in future *GTA* releases.

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Released: 2002 **Platform:** PS2, Xbox, PC

The development of *Vice City* was more like a bunch of friends getting together to produce something magic. I only really wrote one radio track on *VC* for the Spanish station *La Vida Es Una Lenteja* – this turned out to be my most popular track; in terms of YouTube hits and downloads, its in the millions. I couldn't speak about *Vice City* without mentioning Love Fist. You can take your pick from any well-known metal band and relate it to Love Fist – surely it's pretty obvious where we got our inspiration? Apart from the fact, of course, that Love Fist all had broad Scottish accents – hilarious! I think it was originally Allan Walker and Leslie Benzies that came up with the idea of Love Fist. The plan was always to make the band as OTT as possible… we wrote and recorded the original *Dangerous Bastard* demo in Edinburgh. Leslie was on bass, drums and vocals with Allan on guitars. I was on vocals and production. I always preferred the demo version – it was a bit rough but it had the energy that the final polished version didn't have.

Manhunt

Released: 2003 **Platform:** PS2, Xbox, PC

During *Manhunt* I found myself sleeping all day and watching horror movies and writing tracks all night. For *Manhunt*, I didn't want anything orchestral in the score – I wanted old analogue sounds with uneasy noises layered on top rather than a conventional game score. John Carpenter was a big inspiration for me with his minimalist approach to horror scores. It was also the first time we attempted an interactive score – that was quite groundbreaking at the time.

In terms of SFX I remember Allan Walker saying "Would you mind if I just quickly record stabbing someone, strangling them and breaking there neck"? I was the only one that had a recording booth at the time so I was privy to those recordings… we would get fresh fruit and punch the fuck out of it then use plastic bottles to get breaking bones by twisting them and then pitching it down. Allan would spend hours mixing it, then syncing it up to the animation. We're talking PS2 at the time so in my opinion it wasn't that graphic, therefore it was vital to make the SFX as gory as possible in order to make the whole game convincing.



● Drawing influences from John Carpenter, Craig created a dark soundscape for *Manhunt*'s hellish environments.

gamesTM 20 MUST-WATCH INDIE GAMES

FROM THE END OF THE WORLD TO THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE, HERE ARE THE MOST EXCITING INDEPENDENTLY-DEVELOPED VIDEOGAMES ON THE HORIZON

1

VOLUME

Developer: Mike Bithell

Formats: PlayStation 4, Vita, PC, Mac **ETA:** Q2

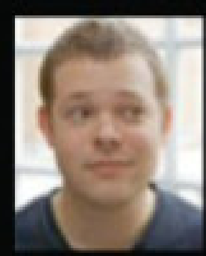
■ MIKE BITHELL IS watching his words. "I've been playing a lot of Telltale's games, so I'm paying close attention to what I say," he tells us. "I'm looking for pop-ups in the corner of my screen: '**gamesTM** will remember that'." Development on his second solo release, a visually-striking contemporary take on the Robin Hood legend (like *Metal Gear Solid* "in a slightly ropey holodeck") is going well. He's recruited Andy Serkis to voice the villainous Guy Gisborne, and the game is now feature complete; all that's left, says Bithell is "polishing, polishing and more polishing".







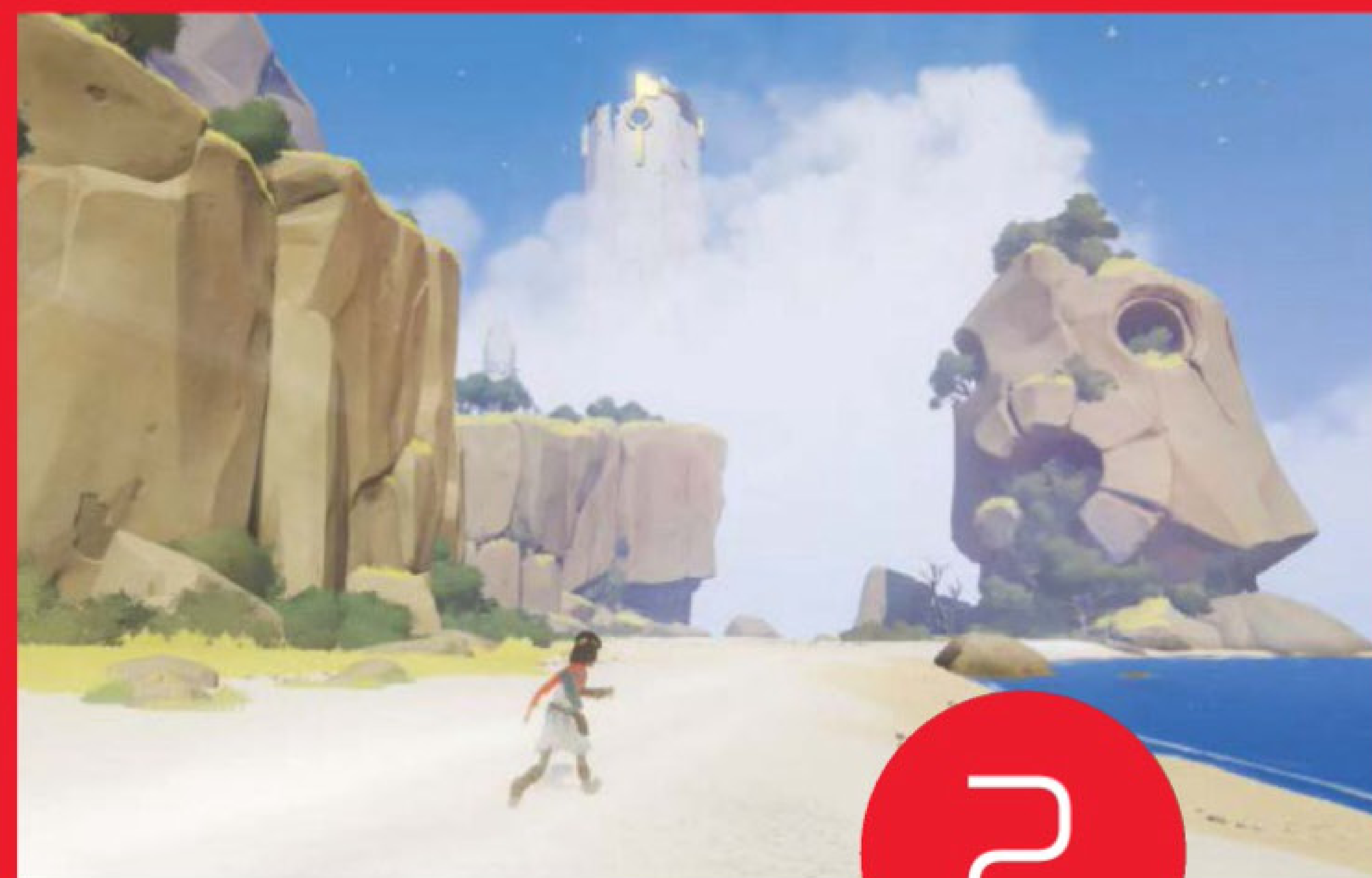
Q+A MIKE BITHELL



You're in a very different situation now than when *Thomas Was Alone* was first released…
Yeah, *Thomas* wasn't so much launched as uploaded. On the first day, it sold about 50 copies – a bit of a slow burner is the polite way to put it. I'm hoping for more than 50 sales on the first day of *Volume*! [laughs] It's going to be interesting watching it, particularly as we have a server component, and even the big boys struggle with that sometimes. Not that the game won't work if servers go down, it's just for people sharing maps and things. There's space for the game to work if things are a bit shaky on launch day.

Was it nerve-wracking to direct Andy Serkis?
Terrifying! I specifically got to the studio a little early and hid in the room for half an hour before he got there to psych myself up. One of the great things about Andy is he knows the process. He knows what a game is, where his performance fits into the whole. It was honestly just a matter of giving him the direction and frankly getting out of his way and letting him do what he does best.

Tell us about *Volume*'s art style. Was it a case of finding a look that fit the narrative?
Well, I'm very into geometry – that probably comes across. I like minimalism but I also like sharp angles and clean lines, and so does [*Volume*'s] art director Daz Watford – I immediately hired him when I started, because I knew that was the guy who was going to make this work.



2

RIME

Developer: Tequila Works **Format:** PlayStation 4 **ETA:** 2015

YOU'RE A YOUNG boy on an island filled with secrets. Lost? Not quite, though you've no overt guidance on how to navigate this idyllic setting. *Rime* will, however, encourage you to pay attention to a few light audiovisual clues – the camera will shift in places, nudging you in the right direction rather than letting you wander aimlessly. Sound design plays its part, too, with music and spot effects. Along the way you'll have to solve environmental puzzles based on light, shadow and perspective, with a limited skillset: the boy can jump and has a shout that produces visual sound waves to denote its range. It's impossible to ignore the influence of *Journey* and *Ico*, but its distinctive Mediterranean feel is entirely its own.



3

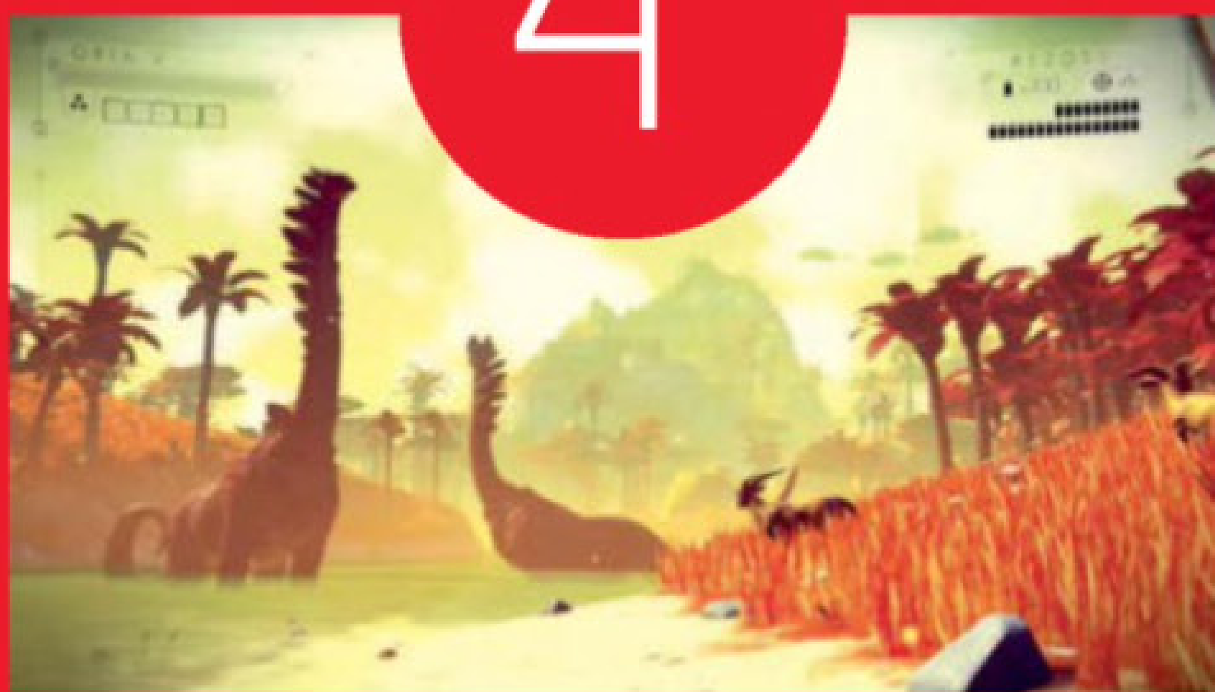
EVERYBODY'S GONE TO THE RAPTURE

Developer: The Chinese Room **Format:** PlayStation 4 **ETA:** TBC 2015

A LEAFY SHROPSHIRE village in the Eighties is an unusual setting for the end of the world, but The Chinese Room has never been a developer to follow convention. You play as the last person on Earth, or so it seems, until you encounter a series of AI characters through subtle guidance, all the while tuning into conversations scattered around the lushly-rendered countryside environments – a delicate, inventive twist on the well-worn videogame trope of the audio log. Rapture's non-linear narrative frees you to make discoveries at your own pace, gently encouraging you to learn more about the world and its former inhabitants. It's a bold approach that could potentially confuse as many as it satisfies, but rarely has the apocalypse looked quite so invitingly pretty.



4



NO MAN'S SKY

Developer: Hello Games **Format:** PlayStation 4, PC **ETA:** Late 2015

■ AFTER A BARRAGE of publicity, developer Hello Games has opted to beat a tactical retreat, and so for the first time in months, we've had to endure a period of radio silence about its enormous, procedurally-generated space quest. Can it even be called 'indie' anymore? "You can't deny when you look at No Man's Sky that it's an innovative, beautiful, fresh and interesting game that absolutely stands shoulder-to-shoulder with triple-A stuff," Mike Bithell enthuses, before helpfully explaining how a tiny team from Guildford ended up making perhaps the most ferociously anticipated game of 2015. "Maybe it's even more exciting to [players] looking for a new experience," he continues. "Indies have gotten better at producing what that big audience wants and because they have the increased resources to do it now."

> "It stands shoulder to shoulder with triple-A"



5

HER STORY

Developer: Sam Barlow **Format:** PC **ETA:** Q2 2015

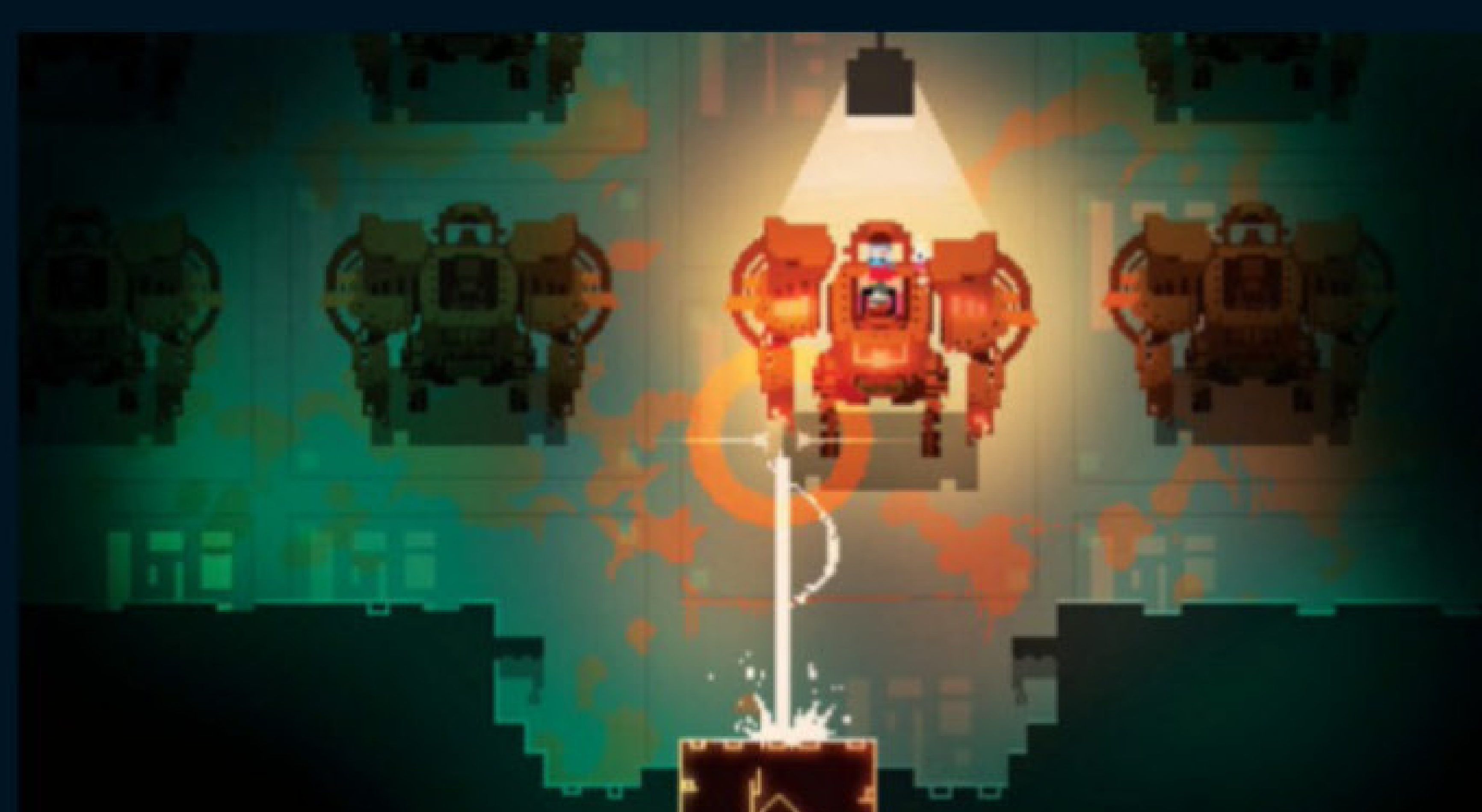
■ THIS CRIME DRAMA from the writer and lead designer of *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* sees you poring over interview footage in a police archive room, using an old computer system to assemble the pieces of a woman's testimony. Your job involves entering key phrases to import clips in batches of five, watching them to pick up further clues in order to filter the important parts and uncover crucial details of the crime of which she's accused. You're perhaps more archaeologist than detective, digging up remnants of the past to create your own picture of events, and there's enough ambiguity to leave plenty of room for player interpretation. It raced through Steam's Greenlight process, which is testament to its alluring premise: *Her Story* is one to watch in more than one respect.

HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER

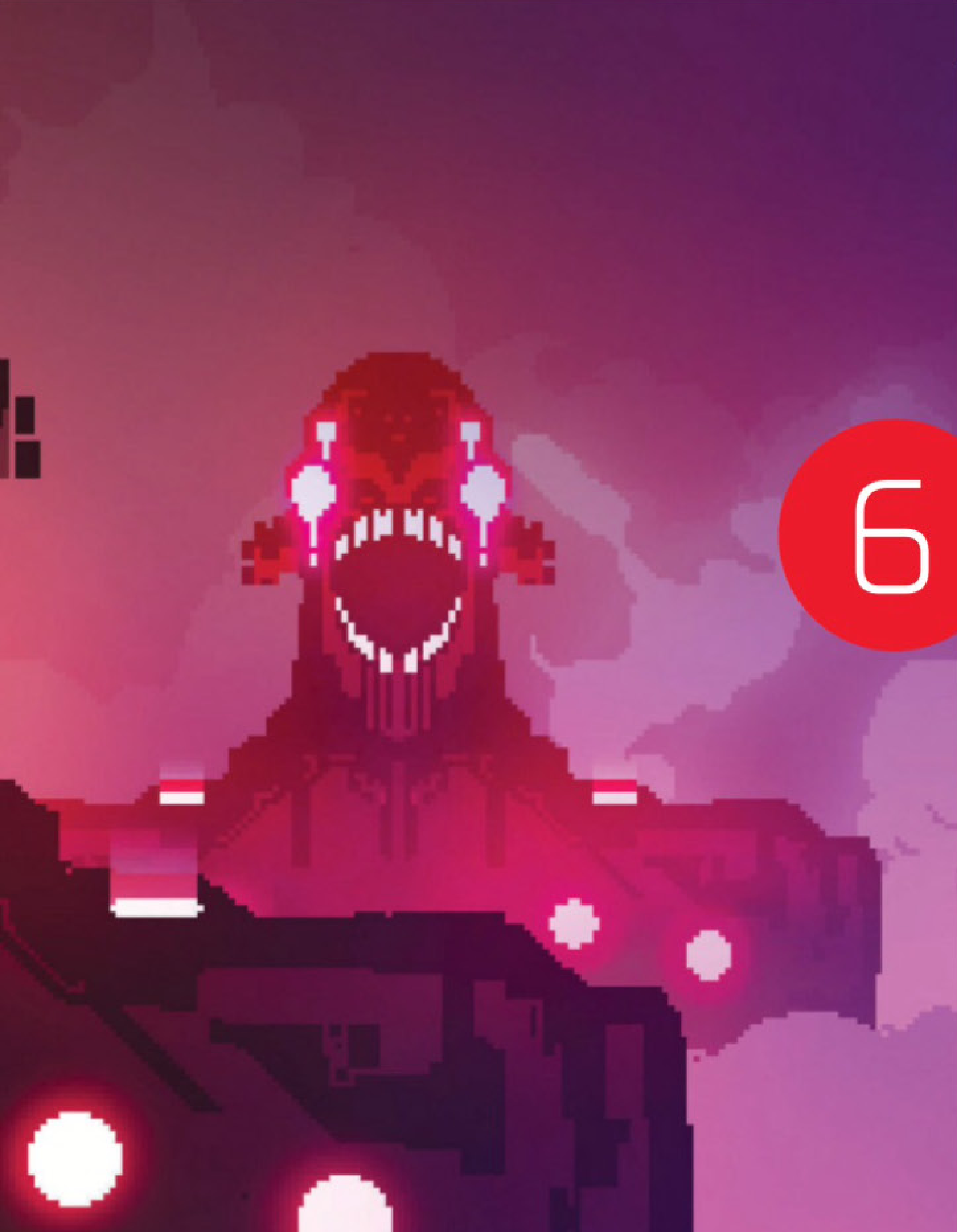
Developer: Heart Machine

Formats: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Wii U, Vita, PC, Mac, Linux, Ouya **ETA:** TBC 2015

■ HEART MACHINE'S GORGEOUS adventure has had us intrigued from day one. With the likes of Hayao Mizazaki and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* cited as influences, this pixel-art homage to the 16-bit classics of creator Alex Preston's youth had an irresistible pitch, not least with a killer trailer accompanying its Kickstarter campaign. Little wonder, then, that it smashes its modest $27,000 target, surpassing $660,000 in total, which transformed the game's development. "Yeah, the project changed when the Kickstarter blew up," Preston admits. "The core concept didn't, but we suddenly had opportunities we didn't have before." The scale and scope of the game expanded, and *Hyper Light Drifter* naturally missed its due date. Following the release of a three-day preview build to backers late last year, Preston and his team sat down to analyse the game. "We realised the things that were working and trimmed the things we didn't like." Now it seems to be on track for launch this year – fingers crossed.

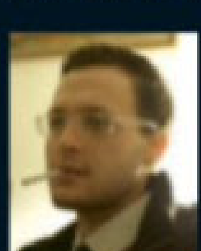


● There's a great mix of fantasy setting mixed with futuristic technology and often weaponry. The Drifter leads with a sword, but has a selection of guns and grenades to work with too.



6

Q+A
ALEX PRESTON, CREATIVE LEAD



***Hyper Light Drifter* is still something of an unknown quantity. Obviously you want to preserve its secrets, but how do you do that while building anticipation, especially from your backers?**
I've thought a lot about how best to address what it is publicly – I want to share the process as much as I can. We update our [development] blog when we can, though it's different to something like *Nuclear Throne* because story plays a big part [in our game].

Kickstarter doesn't seem to be nearly as popular now as it was when your campaign took off. Why do you think that is?
Well, before, you had big developers coming and drawing attention to the platform. We were fortunate to be there when *Mighty No. 9* was going on – that helped to boost visibility. The Kickstarter [boom] could happen again, but for a number of reasons the attention is just not there anymore.

Which games are you looking forward to this year?
Bloodborne. I'm a big fan of *Dark Souls* – [Hidetaka Mizazaki] made the *Zelda* I'd always wanted. *Close Castles* from [*Threes* creator] Asher Vollmer. *Drift Stage* looks awesome, and [point-and-click shooter] *Starr Mazer*. And *Darkest Dungeon* – I'm enjoying the Early Access version, but I can't wait for that to be finished.

> "We were fortunate to be on Kickstarter when Mighty No. 9 was going on"



7

RETURN OF THE OBRA DINN

Developer: Lucas Pope **Format:** PC **ETA:** Q2 2015

THE MULTI-AWARD-WINNING *Papers, Please* has spiked anticipation significantly for creator Lucas Pope's follow-up. This eerie, atmospheric mystery has an equally compelling and unconventional setup: a cargo ship long thought to have been lost at sea has drifted into port with no signs of life, and it's up to you as an insurance investigator to get to the bottom of what happened aboard the strangely deserted craft. With a pocket watch in hand, you're able to rewind time, and a violent tale of greed and murder slowly unfolds. Its striking monochromatic visual style (described by Pope as '1-bit') is oddly beautiful, while some impressive sound design heightens the mood in a game that looks every bit as darkly absorbing as Pope's previous effort.



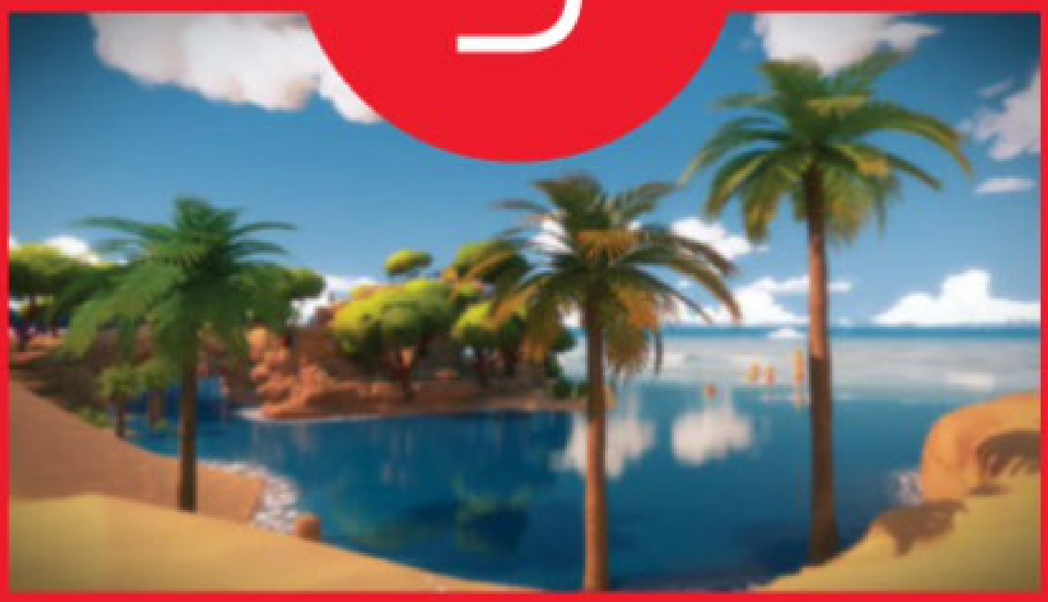
8

INSIDE

Developer: Playdead **Formats:** Xbox One, PC **ETA:** First half of 2015

LITTLE IS KNOWN about *Limbo* developer Playdead's next game beyond the fact that it shares plenty in common with its last. A typically dark, atmospheric trailer presents another world of shadowy threats; again, you're cast in the role of a young boy, but on this occasion you're avoiding guard dogs, searchlights and more as you run through a factory that looks more like a prison. With humanoid figures – part zombie, part automaton – slouching forward in unison, it's a game that throbs with menace.

9





THE WITNESS

Developer: Thekla, Inc. **Format:** PlayStation 4, PC, iOS
ETA: Q2 2015

■ MORE THAN SIX years in the making, *The Witness* has cost Jonathan Blow the fortune he amassed from the success of his debut, *Braid*. Originally conceived with last-generation hardware in mind, *The Witness* has expanded along with Blow's ambitions: he's been regularly updating his Twitter account with the game's increasing tally of puzzles, which comfortably topped 600 at last count. Blow recently managed to speed-run the game in a little over six hours, though first-time players can expect it to take around seven times as long to solve the riddles of its *Myst*-like island setting. As a first-person game centred almost entirely on puzzles, it's likely to be a trickier sell than its predecessor, but Blow is confident in the game's quality, and believes more players are seeking sophisticated entertainment like this. We'll find out if he's right soon enough.







10

"The aim is to create an indie game with blockbuster production values"

HELLBLADE

Developer: Ninja Theory **Formats:** PlayStation 4, PC **ETA:** Late 2015/2016

■ NINJA THEORY'S NEXT game will be self-published, as it streamlines its development process (it's already built its own in-house motion-capture room) while focusing on its core strengths. The aim for this significantly smaller internal team is to create an independent game with blockbuster production values, or "triple-A indie", as the studio calls it. An early glimpse suggests *Hellblade* falls somewhere between *DmC* and *Heavenly Sword*, as a sword-toting warrior slices up dark forces in a starkly beautiful apocalyptic world.



11



CUPHEAD

Developer: Studio MDHR **Format:** Xbox One, PC **ETA:** TBC 2015

■ SONY MIGHT BE the current darling for independent developers, but Microsoft has almost certainly signed up the best-looking indie of all as a console exclusive for Xbox One. Inspired by the art of Walt Disney and Max Fleischer, brothers Chad and Jared Moldenhauer have put together a run-and-gun shooter that looks like a classic-era cartoon. Though the developer has kept its cards close since the E3 reveal, it remains one of Xbox One's most exciting releases. The Moldenhauers have a challenge on their hands if *Cuphead*'s systems are to match its looks, but the pair have reportedly studied the art of the boss battle in detail, and are aiming to have 30 in the game – a genre record.

12

TACOMA

Developer: Fullbright **Formats:** PC (TBC) **ETA:** 2016

■ A FRUSTRATINGLY BRIEF teaser is all we've seen of Fullbright's next adventure, which will take *Gone Home*'s exploration-led storytelling into space. You play as a technician, sent to look around a Nuclear Transfer Station, whose lavish, pristine interiors bring *BioShock*'s Rapture to mind. Excitingly, the studio's co-founder Steve Gaynor has already referenced *System Shock*, while hinting that the simple act of getting around will be affected by the facility's micro-gravity, with important objects floating around you. It's another great example of the games industry's rediscovery of outer space as a setting, offering new challenges to developers and players as they battle against unfamiliar elements and forces. While the domestic story of *Gone Home* was fun to unravel, this promises to be something far more. Roll on next year.



13



THE LONG DARK

Developer: Hinterland Studio, Inc. **Formats:** PC, Mac, Linux
ETA: TBC 2015 (Early Access out now)

■ THE FIRST-PERSON survival genre is an increasingly crowded one, particularly on PC. *The Long Dark* distinguishes itself from its peers through a smart aesthetic, a gripping setup and a focus on battling the elements and your own human needs over a recurring enemy – though hostile wildlife can be a significant danger. Beautiful but unforgiving (your save data is deleted when you die), the game's Survival mode is currently available on Early Access, with a Story mode to follow later this year. It's been gradually updated and improved over the last few months with new features arriving in a steady flow and we have to say we found it so gripping we just kept reloading it after each death.

14



BELOW

Developer: Capybara Games **Format:** Xbox One, PC **ETA:** 2015

■ CAPY'S TILT-SHIFTED adventure has the kind of bleak, windswept landscapes that make you feel very small indeed. As it happens, you *are* very small, your dot of a protagonist dwarfed by his environments. This "roguelike-like", as Capy calls it, purposely disempowers you, as you explore its randomly-generated labyrinths with the scythe of permadeath permanently hovering over you. Combat is simple, yet it forces you to be savvy with your limited tools. New weapons are rare, amplifying the joy of discovery, though all of them have disadvantages, too – and while your hero is nimble, encounters vary enough that you'll have to carefully consider what to equip. Choose wisely, or perish.



15

MASSIVE CHALICE

Developer: Double Fine Productions **Formats:** PC, Mac, Linux, Xbox One
ETA: TBC 2015 (Early Access version out now)

DOUBLE FINE'S OTHER Kickstarter triumph, *Massive Chalice* is a strategy game that takes place over multiple generations, forcing you to breed warriors to continue the fight. Facing an encroaching force called The Cadence – which oddly resembles a substantial Fanta spillage – you've got to choose between expanding your base, researching upgrades, or encouraging your heroes into bed, in order to produce offspring that will benefit from their parents' positive traits.

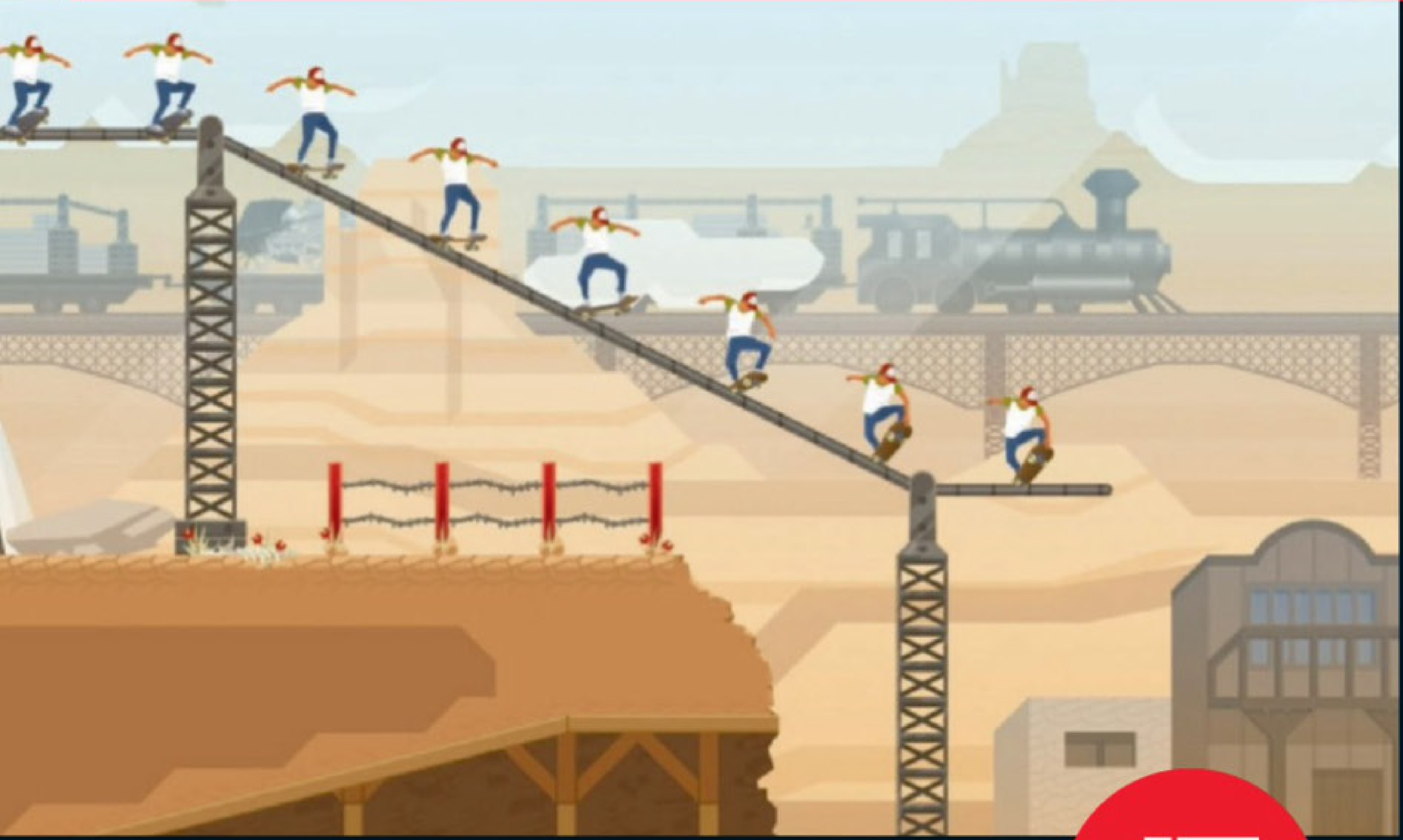
WRECKFEST

Developer: Bugbear Entertainment **Formats:** PC **ETA:** Spring 2015

IF THE NAME doesn't ring a bell, you may remember *Wreckfest* by its working title, the endearingly rudimentary *Next Car Game*. It's a spiritual successor of sorts to developer Bugbear's *FlatOut* games, with nods to PlayStation classic *Destruction Derby* in its focus on automobile destruction. It won't be as blisteringly quick as *FlatOut*, with a more strategic element to how damage is dealt and received: crashes will noticeably affect handling, encouraging you to time your shunts and sideswipes carefully.



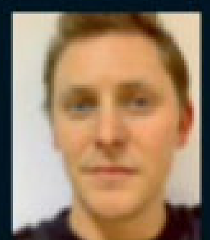
16



17

OLLIOLLI 2: WELCOME TO OLLIWOOD

Developer: Roll 7 **Formats:** PlayStation 4, Vita **ETA:** Q2



"I DON'T THINK any of us slept for weeks!" says Roll7 co-founder and director Simon Bennett when we ask him about the glowing response to its original skateboarding hit. "We sat down and tore it apart once it had been submitted [to Sony], and said 'Let's go and find some day jobs, guys, because this isn't going to go anywhere'. And when it came out, there were tears, there was hugging and craziness and we took the team out for a big celebration." The sequel has a sharp new art style, and expands upon the original's ideas, with multiple routes to take and more trick modifiers. "It's a much more accessible game visually, but we've definitely not pandered to a wider audience. This is still very much a hardcore indie game," Bennett adds.

Q+A SIMON BENNETT

ROLL7 OWNER/DIRECTOR

How does *Welcome To Olliwood* build on the original *OlliOlli*?
If you were good at *OlliOlli* or even approaching good, there are now more opportunities and ways for you to nail massive scores and to show off an individual style. Because of all the new modifiers and tricks, you watch two people and they'll skate the [same] level very differently.

It did feel in the first game that there were optimal routes…
Absolutely, so we've got split level paths now, so for example, if you go up the top route there [might be] more grinding opportunities. Ramps and curved surfaces change things massively, because you can get monster air. On top of that, you've got manuals and reverts which allow you to do level-long combos. At that stage, it's 'When am I going to bank this massive score?' You can lose absolutely everything if you mess up your landing, so there's definitely more of a risk/reward [element] in the sequel.

Which upcoming indie games are you excited about?
No Man's Sky is definitely a big one. *Nuclear Throne* from Vlambeer – I know it's out on Early Access already, but it'll be nice to see that on PlayStation platforms. And *Titan Souls* looks super-tough – that's really cool.



18

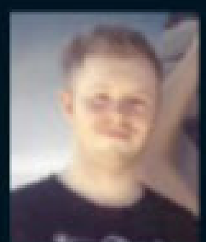
TITAN SOULS

Developer: Acid Nerve
Formats: PlayStation 4, Vita, PC, Mac, Linux
ETA: Q2

■ 2013'S LUDUM DARE theme – You Only Get One – spawned this thrilling, tense hybrid of *Shadow Of The Colossus*, *Zelda* and *Dark Souls*. As a diminutive bowman, you battle a series of bosses with just a single health point and one arrow, which you must retrieve via telekinesis to take another shot. On the plus side, the weak points of the guardians you face only need to be hit once to slay them – not that they make that process easy, of course. *Titan Souls* isn't far from launch, with just QA testing and the porting process to deal with. From what we've played so far, publisher Devolver Digital has yet another hit on its hands.

Q+A MARK FOSTER

LEAD DESIGNER

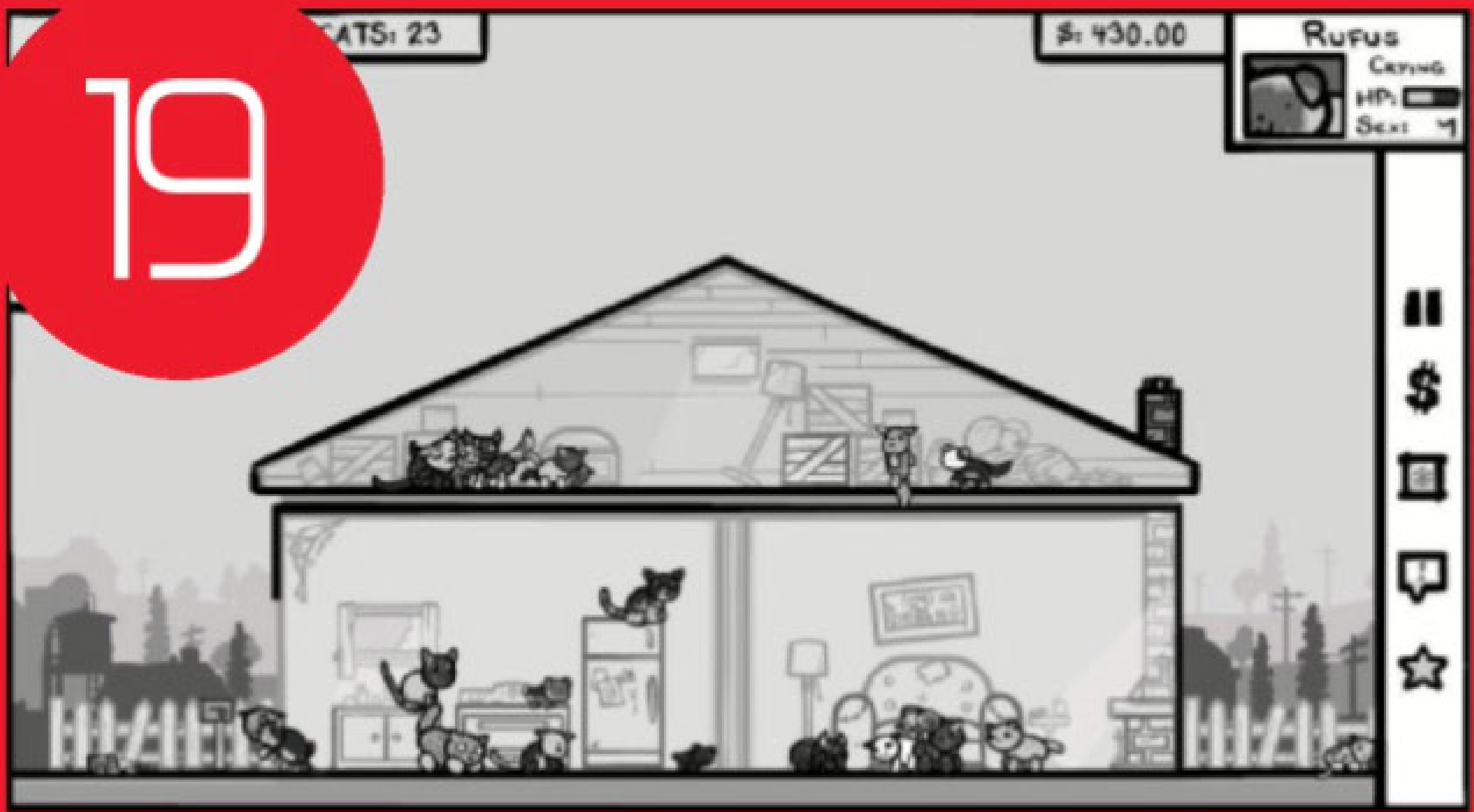


With the framework of the game, is it difficult to create unique bosses?

It's probably the toughest part of the design process. Because the central mechanic doesn't change, the way the game varies itself is by varying the combat, the scenarios, the use of the arrow and the use of movement. We're trying to stretch those things as much as possible – keeping them interesting is a challenge but it's a fun challenge.

So tell us about the process of creating a new boss.

Sometimes we'd start with a visual idea – like snow and lava areas, those classic videogame tropes. Those would then give us ideas on what kind of aesthetics they'd have and then their moves and powers and even their unique weaknesses as well. [For example] there's this lava blob that vomits balls of lava from his own body at you, and then the lava balls return and rejoin and make [the boss] bigger. You have to shoot your arrow into its mouth, and because you can pull your arrow around, you can drag the entire Titan around with it as well. So one way we vary it is by using the arrows in weird ways.



19

MEW-GENICS

Developer: Team Meat **Formats:** PC (TBC) **ETA:** Late 2015/2016

■ EDMUND MCMILLEN'S 'cat-lady sim' has been temporarily sidelined while Team Meat builds *Super Meat Boy Forever* for mobile platforms, though we're hopeful it won't be long until McMillen revisits his most ambitious idea to date. It's a game suffused with its creator's pitch-black humour and design ingenuity: you'll have to manage the moods and behaviours of the cats you own, with potential consequences to every interaction. For example, a cat attacked during feeding time may grow scared of food and starve.



20

FIREWATCH

Developer: Campo Santo **Formats:** PC (TBC) **ETA:** Late 2015

■ THIS HANDSOME FIRST-PERSON mystery is being assembled by something of a development superteam, including *The Walking Dead* writer Sean Vanaman and artist Olly Moss. *Firewatch* casts you as a fire lookout in the Wyoming wilderness, who is forced out of his tower to investigate an anomaly, with only a colleague on the other end of your handheld radio for company. The pedigree of the developer and the enigmatic promise of its debut trailer mean we're keen to learn more about this intriguing title.

Moments of Revelation

-Resident Evil's Weekly Rebirth-

The series that defined survival horror is at a crossroads; now split into continuing titles, Resident Evil is doing everything in its power to stay relevant. But is it working, and can making a splinter franchise really save Capcom's most iconic game?

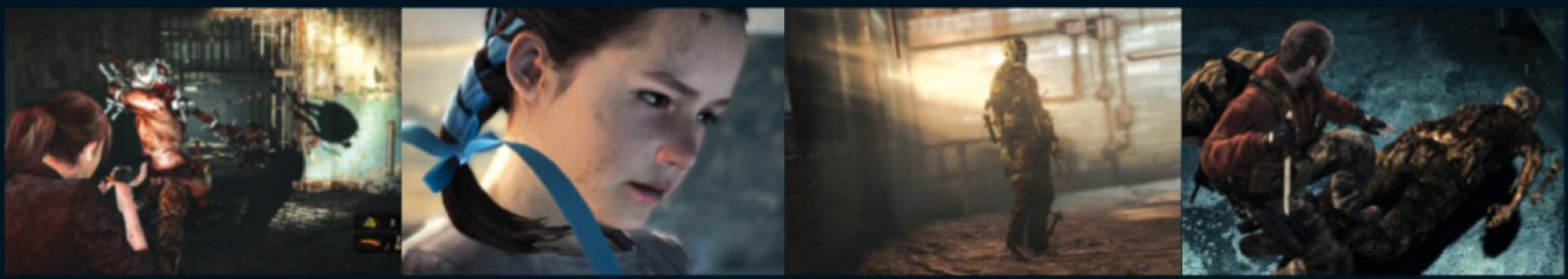
It's been almost 20 years since we first saw the words 'Resident Evil' fade into life on our old CRT TV screens. 20 years since we first set foot in an imposing, pre-rendered house, 20 years since we first heard the words 'T-virus' and 'Umbrella Corporation'. It's safe to assume that most discerning gamers played through the labyrinthine mansion that *Resident Evil* called home, and it's just as safe to assume that – at the time – the game was something of a revelation in its own way: a benchmark for what 3D games could achieve, and a watershed moment for horror gaming as a whole.

But it wasn't until almost ten years later that the series reached its apex. The GameCube's *Resident Evil 4* recently passed its tenth birthday having been released 11 January 2005, and even with ten years' distance between the seminal game's first showing and now, it's clear how much Capcom's best-rated game changed the industry. *Resident Evil 4* got the traditional third-person shooter by the neck, forced it to the floor and put a bullet firmly in its temple, execution-style.

It discarded the fixed camera angles of its predecessors and opted instead for an over-the-shoulder perspective, giving the player full control of what they were looking at without compromising character control. It's not an over-exaggeration to say that this redefined the way we game, or even the way that developers make games. But it didn't just affect the industry, no; *Resident Evil 4* was the point of no return for its parent franchise – the release of *RE4* had made a point, it had fundamentally altered what gamers could expect from a *Resident Evil* game. And the fixed view wasn't the only casualty of the game's innovation: when *RE4* released; the 'survival' aspect of *Resident Evil*'s survival action died. Before *RE4*'s exemplary gunplay, the series relied on ammo management, prioritising threats, delicately managing your saves. *Resident Evil 4* did away with all of that, and it worked – at least for one game. *Resident Evil 4* is easily one of the best games on the GameCube, and is a series highlight without a question, but its success took a toll on the rest of the *Resident Evil* family of games.

Since then, the series has been lost – attempting to relive its golden years, clinging desperately to its muddled identity, trying to fuse its influential roots with its innovative adolescence, to no great effect. It's lost its identity, bogged itself down in myopia – not sure whether it's trying to be ten or twenty years old.

That's where splinter series *Revelations* comes in; freed of the constraints of its parent IP, *Revelations* has the freedom to do what it likes, to riff off *Resident Evil* without owing it anything. The first *Revelations* was something of a shock to gaming media and consumers alike – the 3DS' first true dark horse. It was a relief to see a *Resident Evil* spin-off on a handheld device save a console-specific series from obscurity. After the lacklustre release of *Resident Evil 6*, and the doomed spinoffs that've peppered the series' name since the early 2000s, it could be *Revelations 2* that re-validities the franchise for a modern audience. »



Resident Evil has always been good at combining the innocent with the gruesome, and *Revelations 2* is no different - the undead appear next to children, nature next to death.





The enemy design remains imposing; the best place to experience them is in raid mode, the arcade style score attack mode that makes a return from the first game. There, you must fight waves upon waves of historic *Resident Evil* monsters.



"I think you could say the series is at something of a crossroads at the moment, especially as we're moving into a new hardware generation," Michiteru Okabe – producer on *Revelations 2* – tells us when we ask him how he thinks *Revelations 2* will impact the *Resident Evil* franchise, "it's a big next step. We're always trying to be aware of user needs and feedback, taking note of how people react to previous releases in the series and looking at the reception of each game individually. We always want to bear those [reactions] in mind when we're working on future developments – and that's no different for *Revelations 2*."

> I ALWAYS WANT THE PASSION OF THE FANS - I'LL ALWAYS LISTEN TO THEIR THOUGHTS
>
> MICHITERU OKABE, PRODUCER, RESIDENT EVIL REVELATIONS 2

But what do *Resident Evil* fans want? It seems to be a tough crowd to appeal to as a whole after providing such a broad range of games – attempts at innovation are met with scepticism – *Resident Evil: Raccoon City* was largely ignored on release, and *RE6*'s multiple narratives conceit didn't have the impact Capcom hoped for. Yet the original's second remaster has reviewed (and sold!) wonderfully well. But you can't just give your consumers more of the same every year, surely, so how do you appeal to the core audience whilst still trying to do something new?

"I think you could say [*Revelations 2*] has a very solid core of survival horror, typical *Resident Evil* elements," explains Okabe. "The first *Resident Evil* title I worked on was *Racoon City*, and the intensity and passion of the *Resident Evil* fans is something you realise when you become the focus of it. It's a long-running franchise, people have their own feelings that they put onto it: they love certain parts of it, and they want to see those parts taken care of as you make new entries in the series. It's a good pressure, though: it keeps you on the right road, I think. And when you're making a series that *you* love and you're making the next game in it, it's hard to complain about any kind of pressure. I always want the passions of the fans – I'll always listen to their thoughts and opinions during the course of development."

In our conversation with Okabe, it became clear that he understands *Resident Evil* – that he respected Capcom's legacy with the series and was keen to prove the franchise still has a place. He told us that if a product he was working on carried the *Resident Evil* name attached to it, there were certain fan expectations – and they went deeper than just zombies, intrigue and satisfying gunplay. There was an atmosphere, a solid core of 'survival horror'.

THE TOTAL RESIDENT EVIL GUIDE

KEY:
- MAIN GAME
- FILM
- BOOK

1996
- Resident Evil



1997
- Resident Evil: Director's Cut
- Biohazard: The Beginning

1998
- Resident Evil 2
- Resident Evil: Caliban Cove





1999
- Resident Evil 3: Nemesis
- Resident Evil: City Of The Dead
- Resident Evil: Underworld





2000
- Resident Evil Survivor
- Resident Evil Code: Veronica
- Biohazard 4D-Executioner
- Resident Evil: Nemesis
- Resident Evil Code: Veronica





Barry Burton isn't here to be laughed at: he means business now.

"In terms of the things that got a positive reaction in *Revelations*, we tried to keep that sense of claustrophobic tension you got from being kept on-board a cruise ship," explains Okabe. "Something we learned and tried to improve on was the pacing: alternating chapters would switch away from the cruise ship and take on a more action-oriented approach with a different set of characters. These were intended to be moments of relief from the tension – much faster! – to give the player a break, and make the tense sections more claustrophobic once you got back into them, but the way they were received... well, it seemed the action didn't really fit into the game as well as we planned, especially when the team did such a good job making the cruise ship sections so tense. This time, there's been more of a creative focus on maintaining the claustrophobia and trying not to move away from that too much.

"With that firm base established [in *Revelations*], we felt we could experiment more with the release format of the game, rather than the gameplay itself," he explains. "That's because we wanted to make sure the game felt solid and right before we gave it [to Capcom] to release episodically". The biggest departure for Capcom with *Revelations 2*, then, is its release structure; like many in the industry, Capcom has seen the success of rival publishers and their episodic games and has decided it wants to move in on that market, too. Thing is, unlike a lot of the other developers that are mobilising in the episodic games market, *Resident Evil* has a pseudo-history with the format: the original *Revelations* was structured episodically, even if it wasn't released that way. »

Sending Shivas Down Your Spine

The thought of co-op in horror games repulses some people, and you can see why, really; the whole point of a horror game is for you to feel intimidated, scared, isolated. Throwing another person into the mix undoes everything the genre has fought so hard to achieve – the tension is undermined, the level design is compromised, the ammo management becomes defunct... that's why a little more thought has been put into *Revelations 2*'s co-operative options than when the series first experimented with multiplayer back in *Resident Evil 5*.

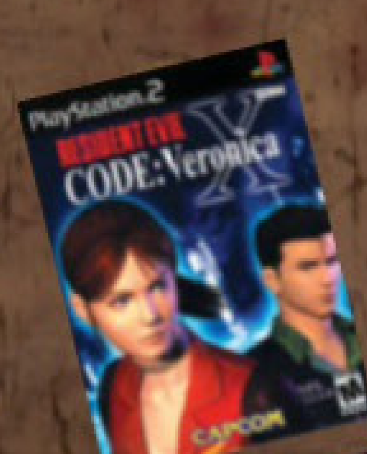
"The original motivation for including co-op was... well, it's been a series where there's always been a horror atmosphere and storyline, but depending on whether or not you're experienced with playing that kind of game, you might not have been able to get to the end and finish it in its entirety – it may have been too difficult, or it might just have been too scary for you! The proverbial dogs in the corridors are just a bit too much for some people!" laughs Okabe.

"We felt that if we could include a secondary assist character that could either be an AI or a friend that could come over to your house or play online with you, it would help you get through [the game]. We had to be careful though, because having two people in a room – in-game or otherwise – is very different to the single-player experience, and we didn't want to ruin that horror atmosphere... so what we did in *Revelations 2* is rather than have two gun-toting agents who are used to this kind of scenario, we'd balance it out with a character that is [untrained]. Claire – who's obviously used to the *Resident Evil* scenario – is paired with Moira who's younger and fresh-faced, who doesn't use guns.

"You can't just go around together blasting your way through the story. With Barry, too, he's a firearms veteran, yet for reasons you'll discover in the game, he finds an abandoned young girl who he has to protect. So I think we've found a good balance between having a useful secondary character or player with you without compromising the horror atmosphere the series is known for."



2001
- Resident Evil Code: Veronica X
- Resident Evil Gaiden
- Resident Evil Survivor 2 Code: Veronica





2002
- Resident Evil Zero
- Resident Evil

2003
- Resident Evil: Dead Aim
- Resident Evil Outbreak

2004
- Resident Evil Outbreak File #2
- Resident Evil: Apocalypse
- Resident Evil: Zero Hour

2005
- Resident Evil 4



A Jill Sandwich Short Of A Picnic?

Fan-favourite Barry Burton makes his first return to the series since his introduction in the first *Resident Evil* for *Revelations*, and it sounds like he's doing his best Bryan Cranston impression to boot. His announcement heated up the blood of long-time *Resi* fans spectacularly, and Okabe only has better news as far as fanservice is concerned. "I don't want to spoil things for people," he teases, "but there's a bit in an upcoming episode where we managed to include a homage to a famous *Resident Evil* line, and I think the way it's been put in the game is fantastic: the scene, the atmosphere and the way it all comes together… it's one of those moments that made me look back over the rest of the game and feel really proud. You see you've come so far and there's an amazing sense of achievement there because of that."



The secondary characters' assists allow you to focus on dispatching foes when playing alone; they can also locate items for you and distract enemies.

"The first *Revelations* game was somewhat episodic in its structure, if not its format, anyway – you had these 're-caps' and next times and so on. It was like watching a TV show, even back then," explains Okabe, highlighting the method that the game used, if not the form. "We kind of wanted to take that idea, but do it properly… Releasing it on a weekly basis (doing it *right*, this time) and going back to the roots of survival horror were the two biggest focuses of both *Revelations* and *Revelations 2*. I hope users will find this quite a unique way to enjoy the game, and enjoy on the episode-by-episode basis it's made for."

> **Obviously, The Walking Dead is one example of a game we've looked at**
>
> Michiteru Okabe, producer, Resident Evil Revelations 2

Cast your mind back to 2005 – just after you've taken down that lumbering zombie with a chainsaw in *Resident Evil 4* – and imagine that person trying to comprehend an episodic *Resident Evil* game… it doesn't seem right, it wouldn't have fit in with the gameplay, the action, the tension. But since then, we've had two passable main entries in the game and a slew of misfired spin-offs… *Revelations* redefined how players could digest a *Resident Evil* game, and if the sales figures are to be believed (the HD versions alone had sold 1.1 million as of February last year), it was a stylistic shift for the best.

"One of the main things we're aiming for with this style of release is to give people the chance to experience the pleasure of waiting between episodes so they can talk to each other about the game – speculate and theorise and get online and communicate about what [the game] is doing," Okabe explains. "It's kind of like what you get with *Breaking Bad* or *Game Of Thrones* on TV: if you watch it on the schedule, you'll get story revelations and a cliff-hanger and so forth, and then you have to wait until the next one… that gives you these so-called 'water-cooler moments' where you talk to your friends about what happened, about what you *want* to happen. You can go online and talk about what's going to happen next – and that was one of our main aims."

Okabe makes a salient point – a lot of buzz and word-of-mouth is generated through commentary these days: YouTube videos, Twitter chatter, Reddit threads. Get people talking – get your audience genuinely invested in the product you're selling them – and you've basically got a free PR machine. But episodic gaming is still a fairly untested market: aside from Telltale, only Square Enix (*Life Is Strange*) and Sega (*Sonic The Hedgehog 4*) have attempted to open up the market, to varying degrees of success…

"Obviously, *The Walking Dead* is one example of a game we've been looking at," reveals Okabe when we ask him what inspired his team to attempt the ambitious release schedule. "But I mean, [*The Walking Dead*] wasn't weekly by any means, in fact there's quite a large gap between episodes. And it's nothing like our game in terms of how it plays – [Telltale] focuses a lot more on adventure elements, but I guess you could say we're similar with our third-person perspectives? Anyway, it was interesting to see how well they pulled off what we're trying to do between *Episode One* and *Episode Two*: online, people were just talking endlessly about the story and what they'd like to see in the next episode, and there was such a big gap between them! That helped me, it made me realise the outcome for *Revelations 2* could definitely be the same with our *actual* weekly schedule."

It's a brave move for a series that – so far – has relied on releasing complete games, games that act as cinematic experiences that you need to chip away at, learn and understand, before you have a chance at succeeding. Games with structured setpieces and causality. But considering *Revelations 2* has been specifically constructed from the ground up for gamers to buy week-on-week, we have faith that Capcom's newest experiment will pay off – we'll be playing it as it releases, regardless, paying close attention to how it handles the episodic pacing and if – finally – we might have a contender to Telltale's thus far unchallenged place atop the throne of episodic gaming.



2006
Resident Evil: Deadly Silence

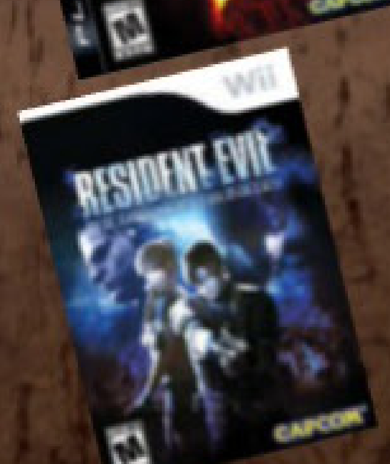
2007
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles
Resident Evil: Extinction



2008
Resident Evil: Degeneration

2009
Resident Evil 5
Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles





2010
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition
Resident Evil: Afterlife

2011
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D

2012
Resident Evil: Revelations
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City
Resident Evil 6
Resident Evil: Retribution
Resident Evil: Damnation





2015
Resident Evil: Revelations 2





WHY I ♥...

THE WALKING DEAD

GUILLAUME CERDA, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, UBISOFT MONTPELLIER

“I’m a huge fan of point-and-click adventures – they were the very first games I played when I was very young. But in the last few years, I have to say, I cried at Telltale’s The Walking Dead*. It was especially moving, because whilst working on [*Valiant Hearts: The Great War*], we were making an emotional game ourselves, and it was a pleasure to see another studio doing it, too, and doing it so well. I really enjoyed* The Walking Dead *– it reminded me of the first [point-and-clicks], way back to* Indiana Jones *and things like that. It’s rare to find a project with a heart like that.”*

“I have to say, I cried at Telltale’s The Walking Dead”

GUILLAUME CERDA, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, UBISOFT MONTPELLIER

EVERY ISSUE PACKED WITH...

- The biggest exclusives and industry access
- In-depth features on the most important issues in gaming
- Reviews you can trust from industry experts
- Dedicated retro content

WHY YOU SHOULD SUBSCRIBE...

- **Save 30%** off the cover price – **just £10.50 every 3 issues** on Direct Debit
- **FREE delivery** direct to your door
- **Never miss an issue**

ORDER BY

30 APRIL

Use code **PQ15** for this offer.

BY POST

Send your completed form to:
games™ Subscriptions, 800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8GU

YOUR DETAILS

Title________ First name________
Surname________
Address________

Postcode________ Country________
Telephone number________
Mobile number________
Email address________

DIRECT DEBIT PAYMENT

☐ UK Direct Debit Payment

I will pay just £10.50 every 3 issues (Save 30%)

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit

Please fill in the form and send it to: Imagine Publishing Limited, 800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME9 8GU

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

To: The Manager Bank/Building Society

Address

Postcode

Name(s) of account holder(s)

Branch sort code

Bank/Building Society account number

Originator's Identification Number

5	0	1	8	8	4

Reference Number

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society
Please pay Imagine Publishing Limited Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Imagine Publishing Limited and, if so, details will be passed on electronically to my Bank/Building Society

Signature(s)

Date

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

A6 instruction form

PAYMENT DETAILS

YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER PRICE, 1 YEAR (13 ISSUES)

☐ UK £52 (Save 20%) ☐ Europe – £70 ☐ World – £80 ☐ USA – £80

Cheque

☐ I enclose a cheque for £________
(made payable to Imagine Publishing Ltd)

Credit/Debit Card

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Amex ☐ Maestro

Card number Expiry date

Issue number ☐☐ (if Maestro)

Signed________

Date________

Please tick if you do not wish to receive any promotional material from Imagine Publishing Ltd by post ☐ by telephone ☐ via email ☐

Please tick if you do not wish to receive any promotional material from other companies by post ☐ by telephone ☐ Please tick if you DO wish to receive such information via email ☐

TERMS & CONDITIONS

Terms and Conditions: This offer entitles new UK direct debit subscribers to pay only £10.50 every 3 issues. New subscriptions will start from the next available issue. Offer code PQ15 must be quoted to receive this special subscription price. Details of the Direct Debit guarantee are available on request. This offer expires 30TH April 2015 . Imagine Publishing reserves the right to limit this type of offer to one per household. Subscribers can cancel this subscription at any time.


Reviews



88

EVOLVE

Has Turtle Rock overcome its beta issues and delivered the first great co-op shooter of the generation?

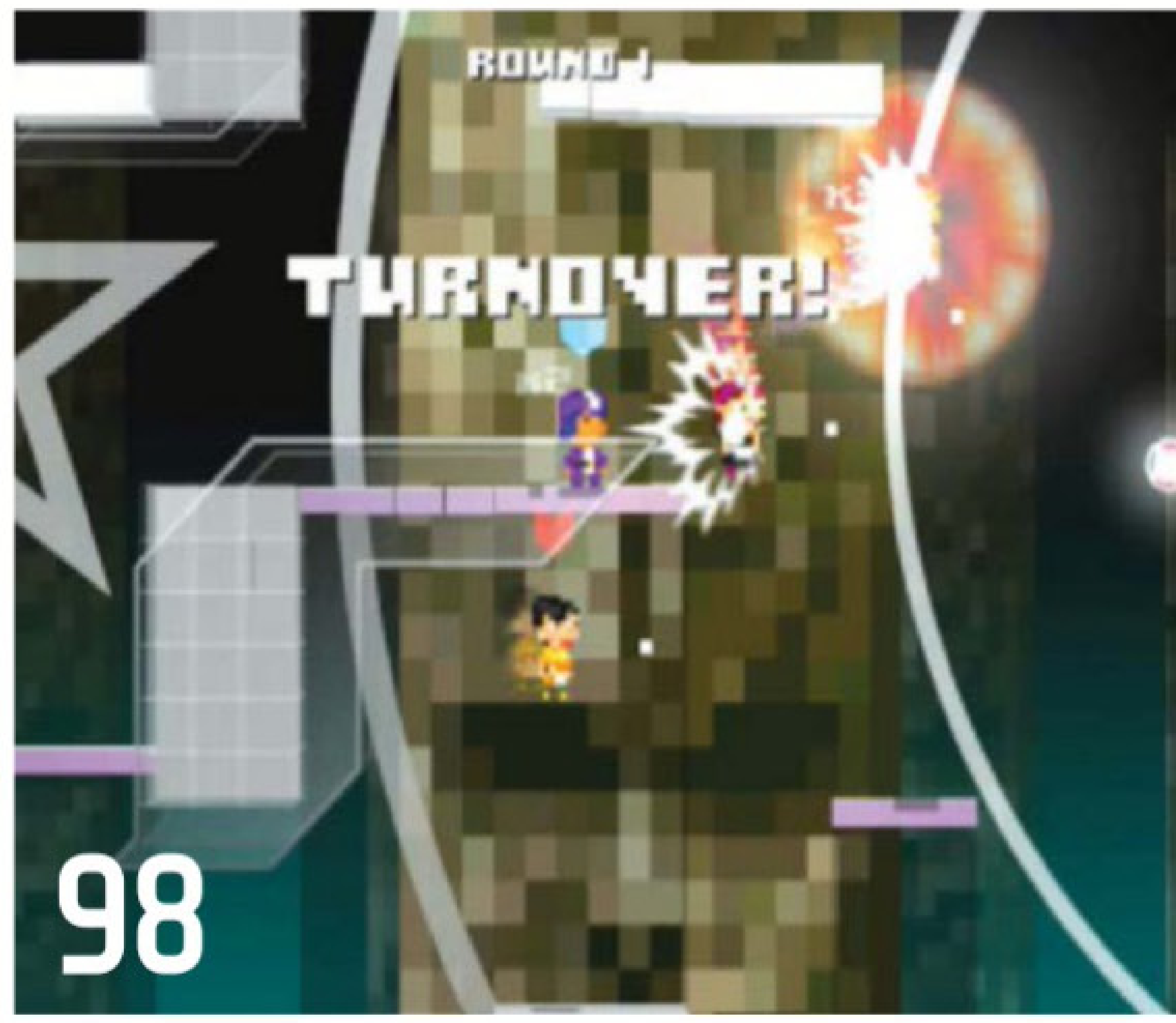


THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists, designed to enlighten, inform, and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.













AGREE/DISAGREE?

games™ is always right. But that doesn't stop some people disagreeing. Think we've got a review horribly wrong? Or did we nail it?

Let us know through the following channels:

facebook.com/gamesTM

@gamesTMmag
#gamestmiswrong #gamestmisright

gplus.to/gamesTMmagazine

MORE THAN A HUNT

There are game modes other than Hunt to indulge in, but none that are equally as interesting to play. Nest populates the map with six monster eggs in random locations, it being the hunter's job to destroy them before they can hatch and provide the monster player with AI-controlled minion to assist it.

Defend sees a fully-evolved monster flanked by smaller minions try to destroy a set of structures, while Rescue challenges monster and hunter to locate and kill/save injured human colonists. An Evacuation mode strings five battles across these four game types together into a very loose narrative featuring the odd cutscene. Frankly, though, your time is best spent mastering the default Hunt mode.



Below: *Evolve* adheres to the current fashion for dishing out accolades for various in-game actions.





IT'S TIME TO GET KRAKEN

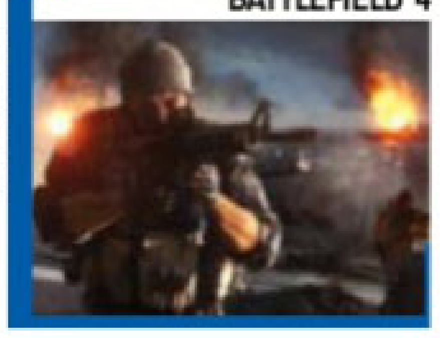
Evolve

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, PC
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Turtle Rock
PRICE: £54.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 (1-5 online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

BATTLEFIELD 4



WORSE THAN



LEFT 4 DEAD

Far from a simple moniker, 'Evolve' is a succinct embodiment of what developer Turtle Rock is trying to do. Here's a game that has been classified as a first-person shooter but brings so many new ideas to the table that the task of categorising it within existing genre archetypes feels futile and crude. Clearly, the motivation here is not to further empower the cynically-held belief that players want more of what they already know – a crime that the FPS genre is particularly guilty of popularising. Instead, the core elements underpinning the design of 'traditional' competitive games have been thrown out of the window. It's not that such ideas have been declared stagnant or old-fashioned; they've been determined not fit for purpose within the context of what has been created here.

'Asymmetrical' is the buzzword hovering around *Evolve* like a mosquito attracted to a wound, with two teams of unequal personnel doing battle and establishing a design pillar around which everything else orbits. Given Turtle Rock's previous work on *Left 4 Dead* such a direction comes as little surprise. In fact, the setup here can be read as a direct and logical exaggeration of *Left 4 Dead*. Humans versus monsters is still the idea, only this monster is bigger and more powerful than anything a zombie could hope to match. Similarly, these humans are more specialised than the office workers and college kids that tend to star during a zombie apocalypse.

Then there's the intensity. If you were tactical enough, you might just be able to navigate past a horde of animated rotting corpses without triggering too much commotion. *Evolve* doesn't give you such clandestine opportunities; its sadistic design principles are forever tempting and teasing humans and monster to come face-to-face. It's a game that desires blood to be shed. To turn this desire into reality, *Evolve*'s primary game mode is dubbed 'Hunt': a four versus one contest in which the hunters seek out their monster prey. Teamwork is the key for the hunters, each serving up a staunchly individual set of talents that only reveal their true potential when used in combination throughout the group.

The monster is a lone wolf, seeking to grow through three stages of evolution with a view to becoming bigger and stronger before ripping its would-be killers apart. Both sides are predator and prey, an actuality that works to amplify the stress and unpredictability of encounters. The hunters' best chance of success comes from catching the beast early, attacking while it's still in its most immature evolutionary phase and taking advantage of its comparative lack of strength and health. Predictably, crucially, this is easier said than done.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

BETTER TEACHERS: For a game that introduces so many new ideas, *Evolve* does a poor job of teaching you how to play. Short tutorials and an optional set of videos is not an engaging way to learn.

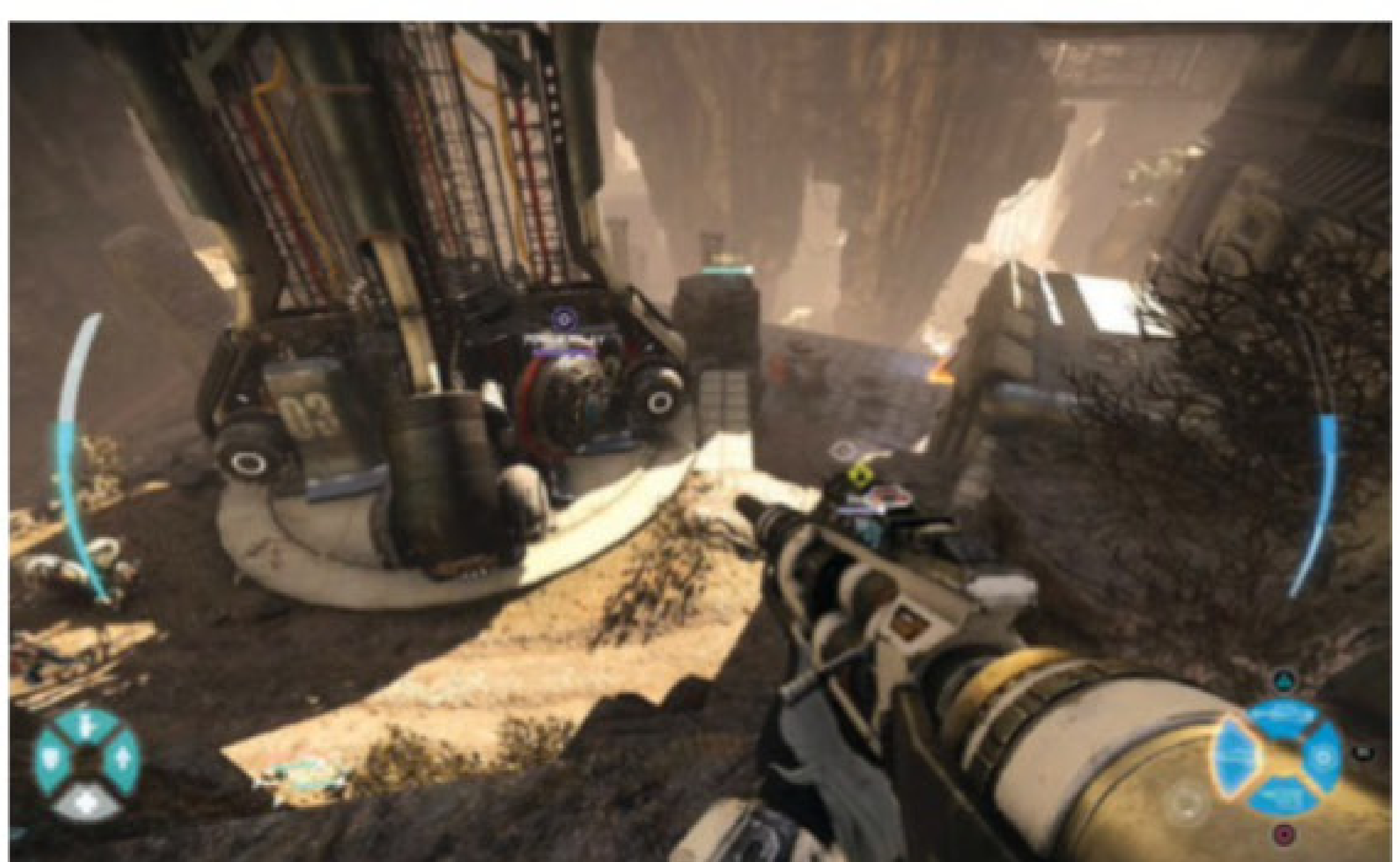
Players commanding the monster get a head-start at the beginning of each round, the time wisely spent moving away from the hunters' drop-in point and searching for the food required to evolve. Alien fauna litter the otherworldly maps, the smaller examples of which are easily dispatched and digested. Their consumption fills up a gauge that dictates when you can evolve to your next stage and most players will want to do so as quickly as possible.

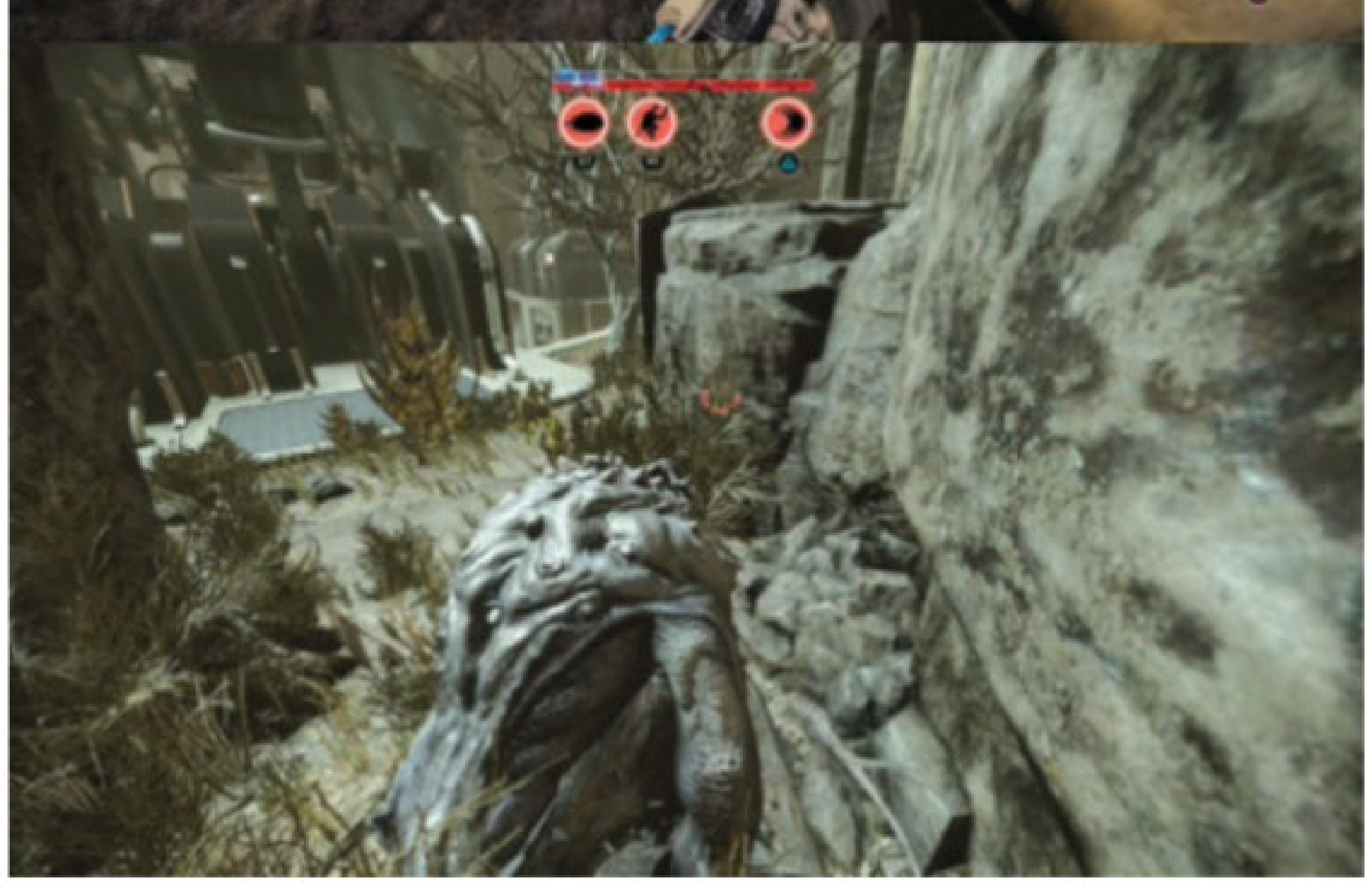
Not so quickly, however, as you can easily give your position away. Monster tracks can be seen by hunters, unless their quarry is moving in the much slower 'stealth' mode. Flocks of birds rest across parts of the map and are easily disturbed, their panicked flight providing a valuable clue to hunters. Similarly, freshly-eaten carcasses are a magnet for carrion; their presence in an area revealing recent monster activity.

The hunters have more than their eyes and ears to rely on when it comes to tracking the monster; a set of gadgets and companions amplifying our lacklustre human senses. One hunter comes coupled with a reptilian dog of sorts that uses its sense of smell to lead you to the monster. Elsewhere, depending on which

FOR ALL ITS ACHIEVEMENTS, EVOLVE IS TERRIBLE AT TEACHING YOU HOW TO PLAY

Below: Once a monster reaches evolution stage three it can decide to attack and destroy a power relay as a means of victory. To prevent this, the hunters' best option is to take up strategic defensive positions around the structure and wait for the monster to appear.





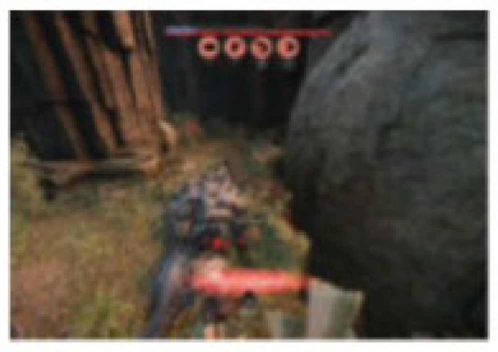
Above: You might be big and strong, but sometimes the best tactic as a monster is to sit behind a rock and ambush hunters as they pass.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

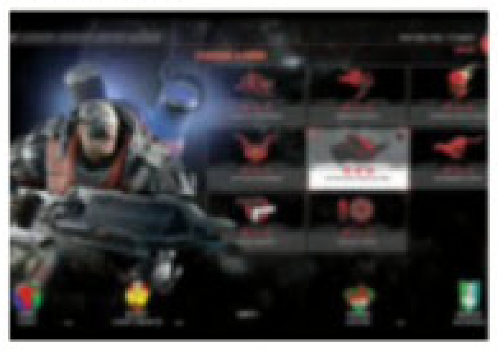
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

30 MINS



Tutorials finished, time to head online and play for real. You might want to customise your badge beforehand in order to stand out a little better within the lobby.

12 HOURS



New monsters and hunters have been unlocked and, now that you've had plenty of time to understand how the game works, you should be work on mastering your favourite role.

3 DAYS



Move up the leaderboards and figure out who you want to regularly team up with. With communication being so vital to success, it's important to play with people you know.

four characters you've assembled, you have access to aerial drones that can be flown around the map at high speed and provide a visual on the beast, motion sensors can be planted on the ground that trigger when passed over and a tranquiliser dart can slow the monster down when you see it.

Knowing the intricacies of your available tools/skills as a hunter is essential. Without learning your trade, you're doomed to fail when facing up against any player with the slightest degree of monster talent. Hunters come in trapper, assault, support or medic varieties. As the name suggests, it's the trapper's role to trap the monster; a set of movement restricting harpoons and a time-limited impenetrable dome act as key aides for the job. The assault is all about dealing damage and, as such, is loaded with powerful weapons and mines. Support comes packed with a shield that can be focusing on allies from a distance, as well as a missile strike and less powerful weapons, while the medic is there to keep everyone alive.

Variations on each class are unlocked as you level up, but the basic concepts remain true no matter which tier you're playing as. The four classes are so isolated in their playing style that each game must feature one of each type. You can't, for example, play as a team of four assaults or three medics and a support. To do so would break the game entirely. The medic, for instance, can't deal any direct damage and the assault needs to get so close to the monster in order to harm it that it would die swiftly without teammates to protect it and provide a distraction.

SYNTHESIS

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

STEALTH COMBAT: It really depends how you play as to how many genres you'll see here. The blend of FPS and stealth, however, will be obvious whether you're playing as monster or hunter.

It's a good idea to dedicate time to learning how each of the classes work even if you decide that you're going to concentrate on being the world's best medic. By understanding the strengths and limitations of each hunter you are more readily able to put yourself in a position to allow your companions to do their jobs properly. It's all well and good being able to whittle down the monster's health as an assault, but without knowing exactly how close the medic needs to be in order to heal you you're going to spend more time dead than alive.

As the monster, however, you can still use this teamwork requirement against the hunters. Dispatching of the medic first leaves the rest of the team incredibly vulnerable to attack, while removing the trapper from the equation gives you free rein to use all of your abilities unhindered. When you do manage to kill a hunter they enter a cool-down period of a couple of minutes that they must wait to pass before they can re-enter the fight. Killing all of them before they can return results in victory. Alternatively, should you reach the maximum

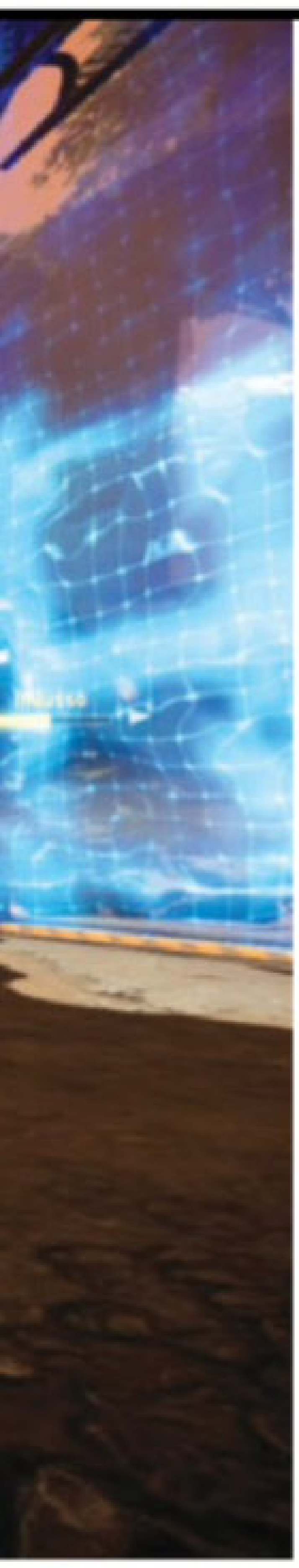
Below: Skydiving in from a dropship gives you your first glimpse of the map as a hunter. Once on the ground you'll want to set about tracking the monster in order to exert as much pressure on it as possible and prevent it from eating the wildlife and levelling up.





A Monster Mash

Currently, there are three variations of monster to play. You begin as the Goliath, a hulking great cross behind King Kong and Godzilla that is all about brute force and getting up close to the hunters to deal damage. Once you've levelled up sufficiently you unlock the Kraken, an slenderer beast that can take to the sky. Kraken can withstand less damage than Goliath, but its greater array of ranged attacks make up for it. Third is the Wraith, a more complicated proposition that relies more heavily on misdirection and stealth. No matter which you play as, you'll still need to feed and evolve until you can fight



Left: Should you die, you get to watch the action from the perspective of the hunters you've left behind. Oftentimes your death leads to the eventual destruction of those around you, allowing you a good look at the carnage your absence has caused.





Right: When locked inside the trapper's temporary jail-like dome, the Kraken's ability to fly is severely muted.





Left: Maps differ enormously both visually and geographically. While the theme of climbable cliffs and ledges pervade each of them, their unique construction means those capable of memorising their design achieve a significant advantage.

level three stage of evolution then you can focus your attention on destroying a power relay that is present on each level.

It's during the battle to destroy these relays that *Evolve* presents its most dramatic moments. As the hunters are given warning that the relay is newly vulnerable, their best tactic is to retreat towards it and wait in ambush until the monster shows its face. Level three monsters are extremely powerful and can kill individual hunters easily should they become isolated or fail to cooperate effectively, making hunter teamwork more vital than ever.

There are, however, no firm rules about how to act and it's this that reveals *Evolve* to be a diverse and incredibly comprehensive experience. Instead of hiding and moving up the evolutionary ladder at the start of play, a particularly skilled monster player might instead choose to wait in ambush for the hunters to arrive. While level one monsters lack the strength of their level two and three brethren, they are much faster and their slighter stature makes them more difficult to spot. It's entirely possible to stalk your prey one by one through stealth, delicately removing a whole skill set from the battlefield before the hunters know what's hit them, crippling their effectiveness.

Above: Understanding your tools is key. The assault's Lightning Gun, for instance, can deal damage to multiple enemies at once. Given that the AI-controlled wildlife on the maps can turn against you if you disturb it, such a weapon can act as an effective crowd control device.

FAQs

Q. HOW IS THIS BEST PLAYED?
Undoubtedly, *Evolve* is best with friends. The level of teamwork required means that you need to fully trust your allies.

Q. IS IT EASIER TO PLAY A MONSTER OR HUNTER?
That comes downs to your preferred playing style. If you like to heap pressure on yourself, be the monster. If you gain satisfaction through co-operation, play a hunter.

Q. IS DLC AVAILABLE?
Yes. Presently only character and weapon skins are downloadable, but new hunters, monsters and maps have been promised for the future.

BATTLES FEATURING UNEQUALLY MATCHED COMBATANTS ARE VICIOUS AND IN NO WAY ENTERTAINING

How you play is wholly determined by your personal ability, desires and the knowledge of those you're playing against. Additionally, different maps offer different opportunities and approaches – learning each of the vast environments is just as important as learning your own abilities. This complexity has an uglier side, however. For all its achievements, *Evolve* is terrible at teaching you how to play. A couple of rushed tutorials highlight the basics of monster and hunter play, while a selection of optional video lessons provide more information, and we suggest you do go through these.

We live in a world of instant gratification gaming, particularly as far as first-person shooters are concerned. While *Evolve* is far from a typical shooter, it's the shooter crowd that are naturally going to be drawn to it. By entirely separating the playing and learning elements, an unwelcome initial pacing is introduced that sees you having to sit through passive lessons in order to understand what you need to do and what might be potentially possible within the arena of play.

Of course, you can learn simply by throwing yourself in at the deep end and picking up information as you go. The problem with this, though, is that you're invariably going to meet players with far greater ability than you along the way. Given the nature of *Evolve*, battles featuring unequally matched combatants are vicious and in no way entertaining. It's entirely likely that a large swathe of players will be put off for life following a consistent early run of fatalities that are so swift that they offer nothing of educational value. Once you've got to grips with both the core and intricate concepts that support the ideas and interactions available here, *Evolve* shows itself to be one of the most rewarding and intelligent multiplayer games to have been released in a very long while. It's no exaggeration to say that this is the most impressive multiplayer-only game to have been released into the 'Triple-A' space on this latest generation of consoles.

The pain that most new players have to go through in order to get there, though, will invariably limit its appeal. *Evolve* has more than enough quality and depth to satisfy an audience hungry for a fresh multiplayer outlook that they can commit to for the long-term, but the question of whether it will go truly mainstream is more difficult to answer. Then again, perhaps that's the point. By not aiming its design at the mainstream – despite what publisher 2K's aggressive marketing suggests to the contrary – Turtle Rock has delivered a game that the competitive multiplayer connoisseur can pour their effort into. Further, such players can feel secure in the understanding that the complexity hasn't been comprised for the sake of courting as large an audience as possible.

Whatever the case, *Evolve* stands as a champion of forward-thinking game design that embraces risk and originality. For that alone, whether you end up enjoying it or not (but play with friends of a similar skill level and you surely will), Turtle Rock deserves respect.

VERDICT 8/10
A STUNNING IDEA THAT REQUIRES SIGNIFICANT DEDICATION



Above: Techland's engine has always been creaky, until now. *Dying Light* is a very handsome game and it runs extremely smoothly, even with tons of zombies on screen. The lighting model is fantastic, and the detail spectacular.

DEATH FROM ABOVE

Dying Light

When did Poland become the centre of videogame creativity and tech-pushing graphics? The marvellous and awfully-named CD Projekt is polishing up *The Witcher 3* for a rapt audience later this year, and the equally badly named Techland has crafted its first true triple-A game in *Dying Light*. Despite the country's economic struggles, the games business appears to be thriving. When the typical narrative around game studios is closure and ruin, how nice to hear about such success and prosperity.

Dead Island's rampant success has had a profound influence on *Dying Light*. This is another first-person zombie romp with a heavy focus on melee combat and systems built for co-operative play. Unlike Techland's breakout hit, though, *Dying Light* has extremely high production values, and an almost entirely new method of traversal. Parkour is the order of this day of the dead, with a *Mirror's Edge*-style freerunning mechanic the best way to avoid the shambling hordes below.

You play as Crane, some sort of government operative sent to work undercover with a group of freerunning survivors holed up in a grubby skyscraper known as the tower, in the fictional middle-eastern city of Harran. How and why you get there, and indeed most of what you do, isn't exactly ground-breaking, but the cutscenes (all done in-engine and in first person, a la *Far Cry*) are well-acted and it rarely hangs around too long dishing out the plot, leaving you free to get straight to missions, skipping the cutscenes altogether if you want to (something more games could and should take notice of). This is a game that tells its best stories out in the open world.

And what an open world it is. Harran may look like your typical apocalyptic city, draped in bodies and barbed wire, but it has been meticulously designed with the freerunner in mind. Huge swathes of the city can be navigated at a sprint without ever touching the ground – a single button controls your leaping, and if you aim at the ledge you want to grab, you'll invariably make it. It's unwieldy at first, but like the best control systems, takes a few hours to master.

During the day, life in the city is simple. Story missions drive the game forward, but there are countless worthwhile distractions. Looting empty houses is vitally important, revealing all manner of crafting components,

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PS4, PC
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: Warner Bros
DEVELOPER: Techland
PRICE: £54.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-5
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

DYING LIGHT MAY HAVE A SERIOUS TONE, BUT DEEP DOWN IT'S AS DAFT AS DEAD ISLAND

FAQs

Q. IS IT LIKE DEAD ISLAND?
Very much so, only much slicker and with a fantastic traversal system.

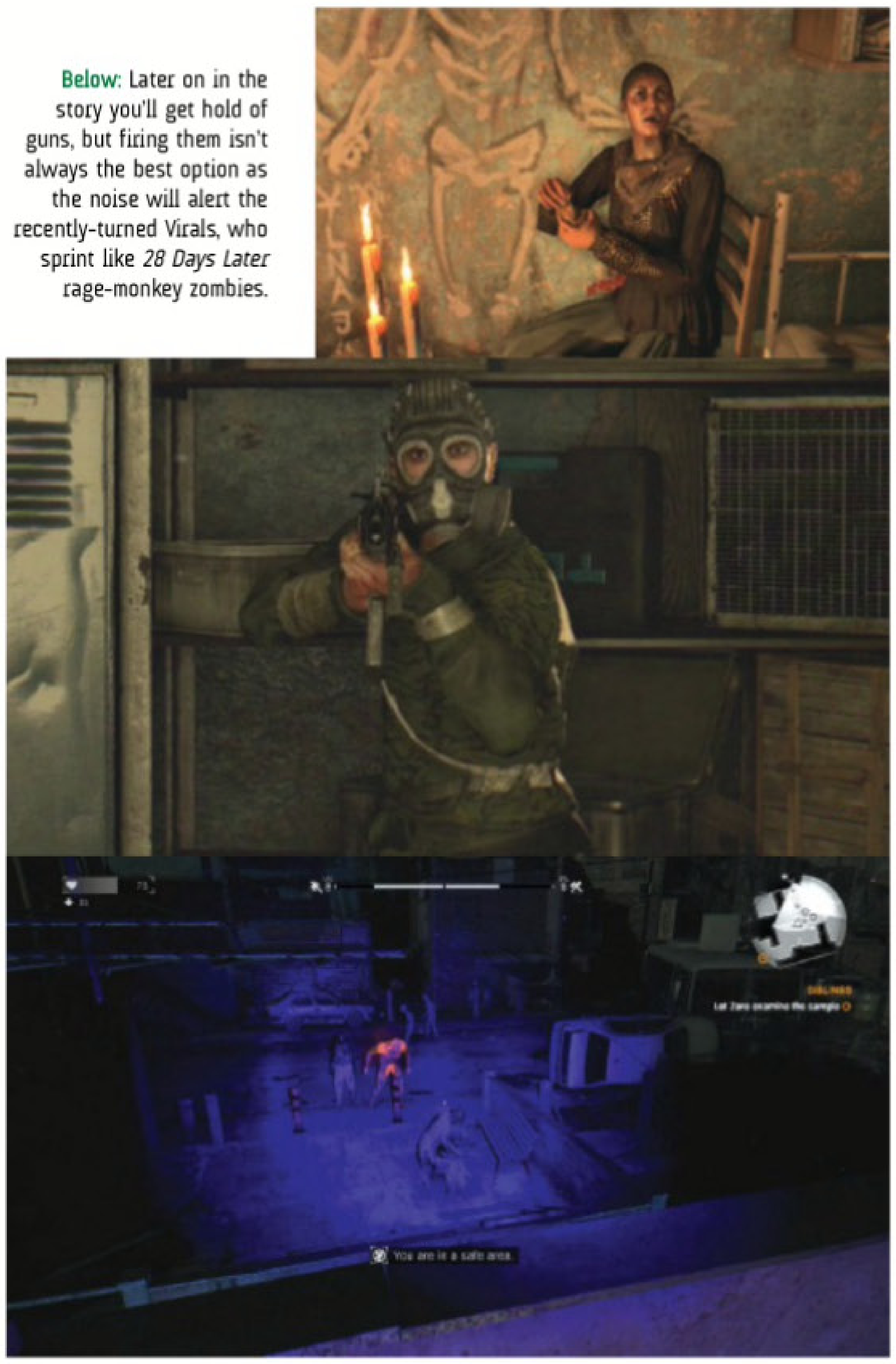
Q. IS IT SCARY?
Actually, it is, especially at night. Tense and occasionally terrifying.

Q. BEST PLAYED ALONE?
Absolutely not. *Dying Light* is a good single-player game, but it's a great co-op one.





Below: It comes alive in co-op. Single-player is fine, especially during the story campaign, but this is a game built to be experienced in a loose, freeform fashion with friends. There is always something to do.



Below: Later on in the story you'll get hold of guns, but firing them isn't always the best option as the noise will alert the recently-turned Virals, who sprint like *28 Days Later* rage-monkey zombies.

health supplies and the occasional weapon, and the multitude of survivors you'll come across at the game's various safe areas (which have to be cleared out, again, like in *Far Cry*) often dole out side-quests. It's not an overwhelming amount of activities, but there is always something to do.

Of course, probably the best thing to do is just whack zombies in the head until they're even more dead. The first few hours of *Dying Light* make combat very risky, where even approaching two infected is a sure-fire way to get a hole bitten out of your neck. A bit of levelling up (achieved through activity, *Skyrim* style) and you can really lay into these chumps. Those familiar with *Dead Island* will understand the basics – context-sensitive bludgeoning. Guns appear later in the game, but for the most part you'll be crushing skulls with spades and slicing off limbs with sickles. It's both hilarious and satisfyingly clumsy, especially when you learn the WWE-style dropkick move. *Dying Light* may have a serious tone, but deep down it's as daft as *Dead Island*.

Matters do get a lot more serious, though, when day turns to night. This is *Dying Light*'s signature feature, and certainly it's most interest idea. When the night comes, a new breed of infected known as Volatiles starts roaming the streets, and if they see you, it's time to run. They'll sprint after you, and you have to bolt through the streets in search of a safe house before they tear you limb from limb. Survive and you'll get a heavy XP bonus. Get caught, and... well you probably know the end to that story. It's a terrifying and exhilarating experience.

Being out at night is basically an awful idea, but it does come with its own rewards. The longer you do remain out there, the more Survival Points (one of *Dying Light*'s skill chains) you'll accrue. Some missions will force you outside at night too. So there are reasons to be out there when it's dark, which makes for a very different pace. The game becomes genuinely scary and extremely tense, and while you still feel in control, the sense of imminent danger is palpable. Also, death is punished by a significant reduction in those survival points, meaning it'll take longer to level up and unlock new abilities, so just allowing yourself to be torn apart isn't a viable strategy. You need to get skilled and you need to play smart.

CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

FOUR PLAY: The game supports full campaign co-op for up to four players, and is the best way to play.
BETTER OFF DEAD: Be A Zombie mode isn't a long term draw, but it's a fantastic little addition

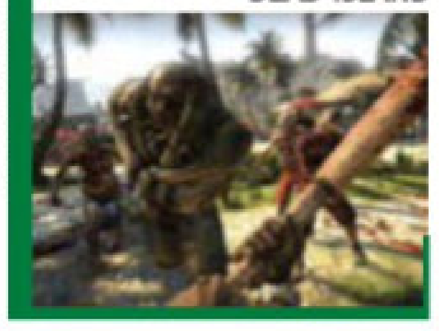
Things are little less scary, though, when you're playing with friends. Like *Dead Island*, *Dying Light* is a game that flourishes in co-op. You can play the entire game with up to three friends (including all campaign missions), and it has clearly been designed with this in mind. There is so much to do out in the open world, and the game offers optional competitive challenges at almost every turn. Start looting, and it'll ask if you want to compete for the most loot in a minute. Get into a scrap and it'll challenge you to take out more zombies than your partners. This is great dynamic co-op design, and massively elongates *Dying Light*'s length. You can happily spend hours just mucking about, killing zombies, levelling up and looting without ever worrying about the story.

It feels as though Techland has always had this game inside of it, like it's been waiting to bust out this technically proficient outpouring of destructive fun. *Dying Light* is a class apart from its typical output, and a class apart from most zombie games too. A shining beacon in a sea of grisly rotting death.

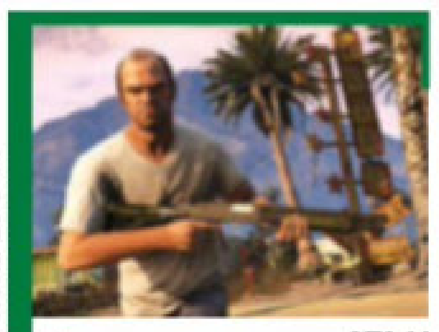
LEFT FOUR DEAD

Originally just a preorder incentive but then wisely offered up to everyone, Be A Zombie mode introduces a thrilling slice of competitive multiplayer into the action. At any point (with the appropriate option active), your world can be invaded by a real player taking control of a Night Hunter zombie. Players have to rush to destroy nests dotted across the map before the Night Hunter takes down their bank of lives. It's a one-hit kill for the zombie, but the humans can use their UV torches to stun it then take it out for a brief respite. It's a good 15-minute burst of fun.

BETTER THAN — DEAD ISLAND



WORSE THAN — GTA V



VERDICT 8/10
SLICK, SCARY AND SERIOUSLY BIG

IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask 3D



Below: Skullkid's twitchy contortions still remain, and they actually make us feel even more uncomfortable than before, rendered as they are in stereoscopic 3D.



DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

Nintendo seemingly cannot get away from making these little nostalgia trips through its back catalogue. After the warmly received *Ocarina Of Time 3D* in 2011, we thought, or perhaps just hoped, that Nintendo had gone off to develop new *Zelda* games – the upcoming Wii U *Skyrim*-inspired horseback riding simulator, for example. But we were wrong. The dedicated team working on the remasters started work straight away on something else – *Majora's Mask 3D* has been in development for over three years.

You might think that's a ludicrously long time for a simple remake, but *Majora's Mask 3D* is so much more than that. It's practically a completely new game – the small revisions to the core control mechanic offsetting the original game's sometimes awkward controls. Eiji Aonuma – series producer – once stated that he had so much trouble developing the original game, he'd never go back for a remake. But he went back and played the original, and decided it'd make a far better game on handheld. And, by the song of the ocarina, was he right.

The stereoscopic 3D looks amazing – the depth of field adds to the feeling of completeness that's always been at the forefront of Termina, and Link's character model (particularly in his Deku form) is a joy to look at. The character models – once weirdly flattened and all a bit goblin-like, are now sharper, crisper, and the high resolution actually makes us notice things we never clocked in the original game.

There are so many small revisions to the textures and world of Termina that the familiar always feels uncannily abstract: it's like déjà vu gone wrong. The game feels all the better for it, though: if you spent vast chunks of your childhood whiling away the hours under the impending doom of a crashing moon, the unfamiliarity of some of the game's new features will genuinely excite you. It's like discovering secrets you never knew were there – even the newly implemented fishing mini-game feels like it's always been there. The authenticity is astounding.

We played the game on the New 3DS, too, the features of which galvanise the once temperamental camera. Using the new C-stick nub controller, you have *full* control over a camera that could once present itself as your worst enemy. The touchscreen revisions also help glaze over some of the more frustrating UI elements – there's no more menu-hopping silliness if you want to switch masks; the bottom touchscreen allows you to simply scroll through all your collected masks without pause, equipping one to a slot that can be tapped to equip/unequip. Handy in boss fights, handier in adventure platforming sections.

TERMINA'S BIZARRO OTHER-WORLD HAS KEPT ITS SENSE OF DISCOMFORT OVER THE 15 YEARS SINCE THE GAME WAS FIRST RELEASED

The Bomber's Notebook makes a return once you're a little way into the game, too; the handy guide has been revamped with a more intuitive interface – your quests-in-progress, unlocked quest hints and other puzzle-solving miscellany are all laid out simply and effectively, so you can manage your schedule in Termina's weird three day lifespan with a little more clarity. That impending doom that's always overshadowed the game remains as sinister as ever, and with HD graphics, the moon's demented face is even more imposing. The bizarro other-world has kept its sense of discomfort over the 15 years since the game was first released. In fact, if you go back to the game with the theory that Link actually dies at the start of the story in mind, replaying it feels justified (beyond enjoying the new features).

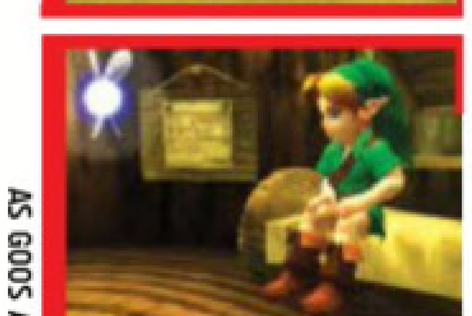
Saving the game has been simplified – the Owl Statues make a return, and allow you to fly between them like terminals. This is handy for navigation and completionism, removing that dead time between traversal – and the whole mechanic is streamlined, much like a lot of the other general mechanics from the first game. Bear in mind this is a game made for handheld – you're going to put the game into Sleep Mode more than you're going to save, so don't expect to be quitting out to the 3DS Home Screen often – you can't just 'Save State' on a whim.

BETTER THAN

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS



AS GOOD AS



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME 3D





GO FISH

Nintendo has added two fishing ponds to the game, where you can go to enjoy a light spot of everyone's favourite *Zelda* pastime. Except… it doesn't really fit here. Imagine it – the world is coming to an end, there's a terrifying grinning moon in the sky with flared nostrils threatening to kill you any second, so you sit back by a lake and bring out your rod to indulge in a light spot of fishing… it evokes an acute sense of discomfort, this weirdly comic contrast. On a mechanical note, though, there's a new enemy to confront if you spend an adequate amount of time fishing. It's another layer of weirdness in a game that was already teeming with obtuseness, so perhaps it's not such a strange addition after all?



FAQs

Q. WILL I FINISH 100% OF THIS GAME?
You can, but it will take you at least five resets – more likely infinitely more. All the old walkthrough data is wrong, now, too.

Q. IS IT WORTH BUYING A NEW 3DS FOR?
The camera control the C-stick offers you makes all those old camera complaints redundant, so for *Zelda* aficionados, definitely.

Q. HOW'S THE SOUNDTRACK?
It's even better than you remember. You might not believe us on that, but the 3DS sound card is a damn sight better than that 32-bit noise.

Left: Deku Link still looks as mournful and panicked as he used to, but the HD overlay makes his eyes look even more weepy..

Above: 'You've met with a terrible fate, haven't you?' is one of the most terrifying and knowing lines in *Zelda* lore. You'll be glad to know it makes a reappearance.

Collecting each of the masks, reliving the actual end of the world over and over, observing the local's existential brand new dread each time… it's the same offbeat dark tone as before, but being released now, again, after the adventures of Toon Link, the revisited *Ocarina Of Time*, the re-done *Link Between Worlds* – it all reminds us how unique *Majora's Mask* is as an action-RPG. It's a dark twist on the core formula that Nintendo always knew was safe. We've played it again, and we still can't think of many other cute 'children's games' that have such a nihilistic, spooky tone.

The whole time mechanic – using the Ocarina to manipulate the world's chronology – is still wonderfully warped: we still only really ended up getting one mask per run through, which is actually really mean when you consider you snuff the lives of *an entire world* out just because you want to get the quest line right. Still, the world resets, so it's fine, right? *Right*!?

Majora's Mask is the game it always was – the black sheep of the *Zelda* family, the sleeper hit, the philosophical question posed by Nintendo. It's dark, it's about death, it's about coming to terms with death. There are characters who are abusive (look for it, it's there), there are characters in denial, there are characters that utterly can't accept they're going to die. The game is actually better suited to handhelds than consoles nowadays, and the team at Nintendo has kept this at the forefront of its design philosophy throughout – this is a more accessible, more fluid experience than before, and that was all we could have asked for from this remaster.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LUNAR ELEGY: The doom-laden fatalism that drenches Termina is horrifying, and we can't think of another game that does apocalyptic subtleties so well.

VERDICT 9/10

A WORTHY REMAKE OF THE MOST INTERESTING ZELDA GAME









Left: The land of the living is a garish place, perhaps even more terrifying than anything you could find in the land of the dead. It makes for a nice contrast with the noir setting of the rest of the game.

DEAD AND LOVING IT

Grim Fandango Remastered

Death; it's a laugh, isn't it? All that toil and effort through life only to find that you've been dumped in the land of the dead with a world to travel before you can get to the cushy afterlife you've been promised all those years. Or such is the circumstance Tim Schafer imagined when he wrote and directed *Grim Fandango* with LucasArts back in 1998. This remastered game from his studio Double Fine does two important things. First, it proves that the core ideas, design and concept of this much lauded adventure game have lost none of their potency. Second, it gives everything just enough of a lift to make it a small treat for the modern era.

Typically 3D visuals don't age all that well, certainly by comparison to how cool many pixel-art games look to this day, but Grim Fandango has stood up to the test of time graphically. A lot of the credit here has to go to the fact that it's a wonderfully stylised world already and really very little has been done to smooth out its rougher edges than simply adding in some dynamic lighting. It's a small touch that goes a long way however, helping to reveal new contours to the aged polygons. Some of the backgrounds and textures could be better, but it all seems in tune with rest of the setting. There's no jarring new dropped-in assets and the creepy, noir vibe has been maintained.

What's required no maintenance is the typically sharp, witty and varied script *Grim Fandango* enjoys. The quirky dialogue choices and banter of Manuel Calavera remain as enjoyable as ever as his relatively selfless quest to save a lost soul takes him on a circuitous journey through the land of the dead. Odd little circular conversations (such as asking a beat poet to keep on getting up on stage to repeat pointless prose) haven't lost any of their surreal appeal. It might feel a little jarring to those coming to this game new, more used to objective-based chats with NPCs in BioWare games. Sometimes a chat is just a chat, but sometimes you need to exhaust the conversation before you get anywhere.

Frustration may well appear elsewhere, though. As is all too common with adventure games, the puzzles can often descend into trial and error as you keep on trying to interact with objects in the world with whatever you have lying around in your inventory. Such cul-de-sacs of logic aren't all that common, but they come around and have lost none of their potent brain-befuddling power with the passing of time. Ultimately, though, its age has only given it a new layer of context that seems to enhance its fun and intrigue. *Grim Fandango* remains one of the best of its class and a wonderfully witty noir adventure.

ENHANCED

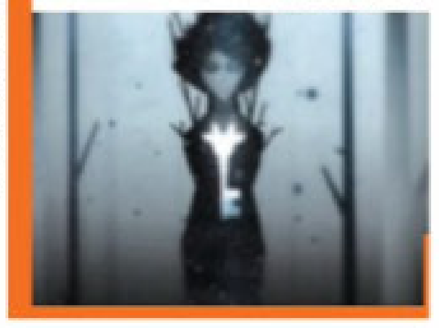
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

FRESH SCORE: The original soundtrack to the game has been re-recorded with a live orchestra.
COMMENTARY: The game features a developer commentary from many members of the original team.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PS4, Vita, Mac, Linux
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Double Fine
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £10.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Vista, Intel Core 2 Duo 2.4 GHz, AMD Athlon X2 2.8 GHz, 4GB RAM, ATI Radeon HD 4650 / NVIDIA GeForce GT 220 / Intel HD 4000 Graphics, 6000MB HDD space, GPU that supports OpenGL 3.3

BETTER THAN — YEAR WALK



WORSE THAN — MACHINARIUM



VERDICT 8/10
A WELCOME RETURN TO PURGATORY

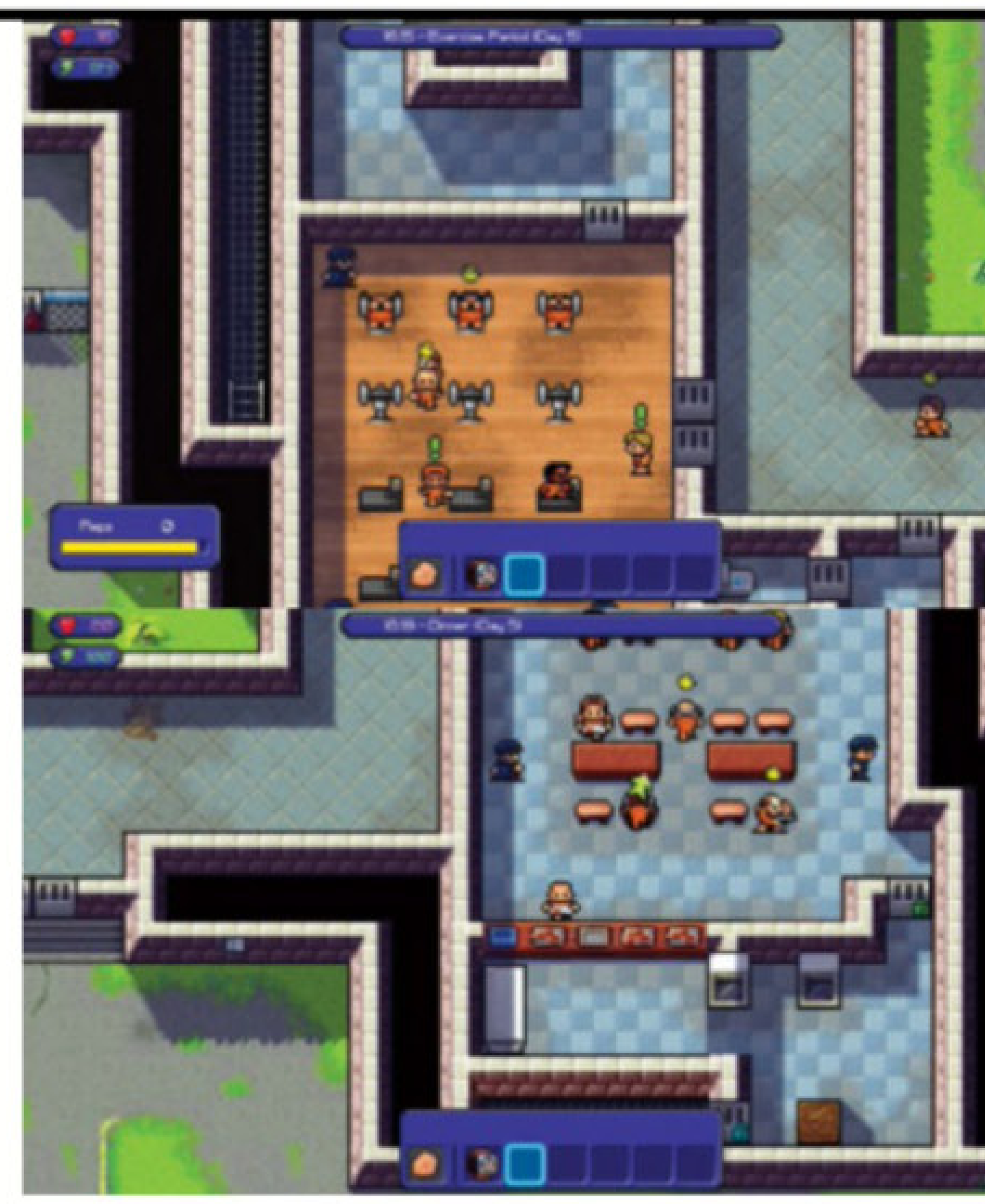




Above: Inspired by dozens of film noir mystery movies and the arts of the Mexican Día de Muertos, *Grim Fandango* has some wonderful background design as well as incredibly expressive characters throughout.

Below: With six prisons to work your way through, escaping one will only get you banged up somewhere even worse. Perhaps you're best off serving your time...





YOU'RE IN FOR SOME HARD TIME

The Escapists

By day 19 of our incarceration we had begun to lose hope. We're told hope is the most dangerous thing you take into prison with you, and frankly ours had been sapped dry. There was no escape from this place. No redemption to be found other than by serving our time. We went to breakfast, worked out in the gym, said hello to the Warden, went to lunch, did our laundry duty, worked out, showered, had dinner, said hi to the Warden again and went to bed. Those were our days in *The Escapists*. We had become institutionalised.

Or so we had them believe. *The Escapists* is at its best when you give yourself over to playing the long game. Methodical preparation and patience are the key to success, and while you could probably blitz through Center Perks with a guard's uniform and a shiv, that's not really in the spirit of the game. No, to be a true escape artist you need to manage your time, gather your tools and spring a plan so devious, quick-witted and cunning they'll be scratching their heads for months before finding you on a beach in Mexico waxing your boat.

It's easy to fall into the trap of trying too much too fast with *The Escapists,* as we discovered for ourselves. With little to no instruction from the game, you're left to discover the limits of your incarceration on your own. When can you be out and about? What items are you going to be in trouble for carrying? How many times can you be spotted pinching items from other inmates cells before the guards throw you in solitary? You won't know unless you try.

And you could start by taking every favour that's asked of you, stealing items, beating up other jailbirds, but that's only going to get you jumped every time you walk down a corridor by some other disgruntled cell block brother. We made these mistakes early and with some gusto. We threw ourselves head first into the manic chaos of prison life and brutality. Thankfully, we could quit out and start again with a more methodical approach.

But by being as unhelpful and demanding as it is, *The Escapists* could just as easily fling you off as draw you in. If you were to get bored with the repetitive tasks, the constant tapping of exercise or walking back and forth to the canteen every few hours we wouldn't blame you. It can be monotonous. But it also makes those brief moments in-between that are entirely yours, as your plan comes together, really quite thrilling. The intensity of them is up to you.

Until we realised that the enjoyment of this game is in the planning and gradual execution of an escape rather than the act of escaping itself, we were beginning to question whether we were really having any fun at all. But it was there all along. It's stringent, stripped back and sometimes a chore, but when things click for *The Escapists* it can be a delightful challenge to overcome.

DETAILS

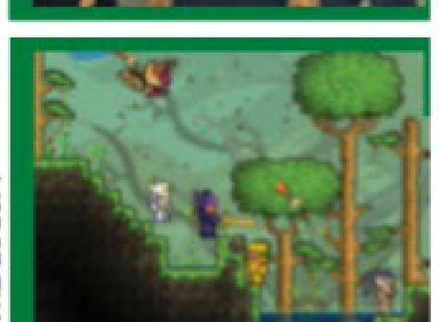
FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Team 17
DEVELOPER: Mouldy Toof Studios
PRICE: £14.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

PRISON BREAK: THE CONSPIRACY



WORSE THAN

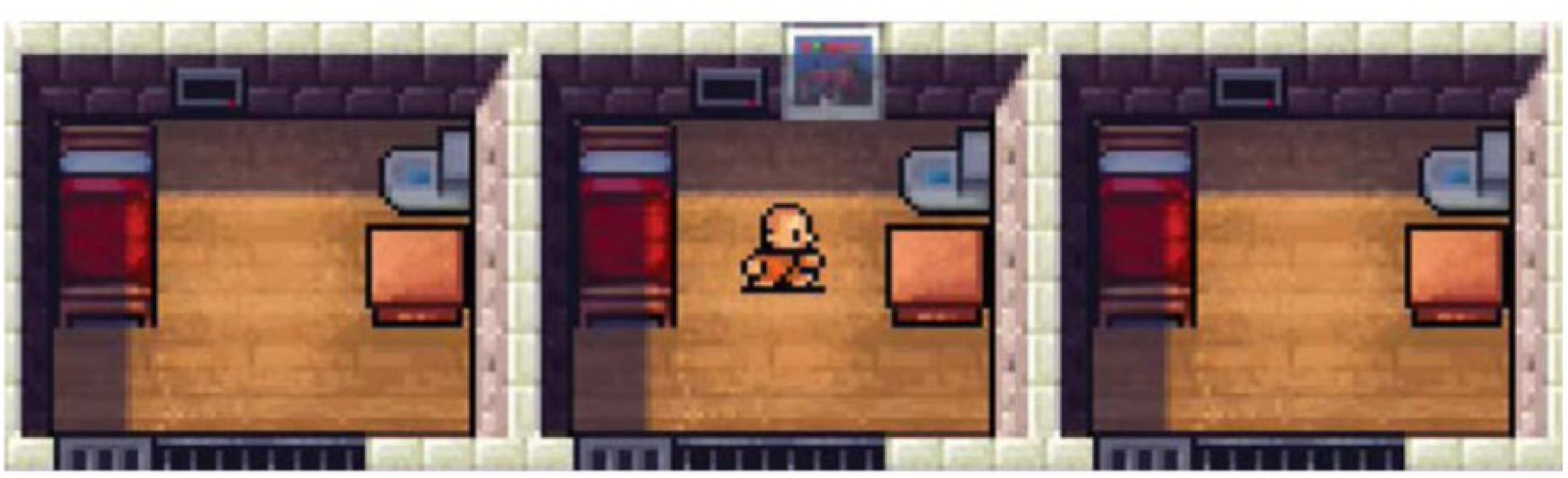


TERRARIA

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS: While there's something to be said for the solitary world you've been dumped in, working with a friend online would have added a great deal to the escape experience.



VERDICT 7/10

METHODICAL AND ODDLY COMPELLING INCARCERATION

SHORT-LIVED SPORTING GLORY

#IDARB





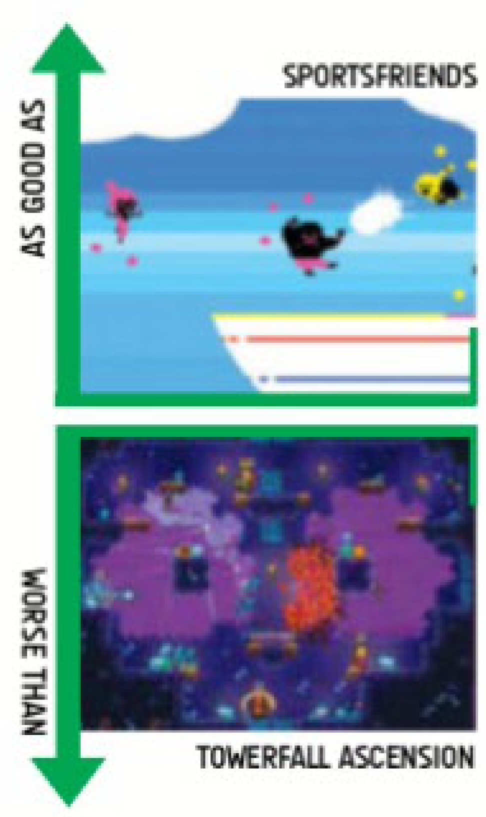
Above: The *#IDARB* screen is a mess of information, from the live scrolling tweets along the bottom to the announcement of major events through the game. Most important though is the hashtag ID in the top left for people to mess with your game.

What glorious chaos is this? What insane mind could have conceived any logical system that would give structure to such a thing? *#IDARB* is a strange hybrid of *Smash Bros* and playground football. It's loosely a sports game, but much more clearly a mass pixelated brawl where occasionally a sport breaks out. Perhaps most importantly, it's insanely good fun once it gets going.

It really needs other players to get the most from it, but we have to hand some credit to Other Ocean for attempting to build something more substantial than the bare bones of a concept. On top of the online and offline multiplayer options that will hopefully be your primary experience of the game, there's a relatively robust single-player campaign to work your way through against AI, increasing the challenge offered by your opponent through more intelligent play and greater numbers. There's even a gambling mini-game to partake of. Alas, not much more than a distraction in the scheme of things.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Other Ocean Interactive
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £10.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-8
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



The true joy of playing *#IDARB* comes with playing others online and locally, with an impressive eight-player local play capability and some chaotic online competition too. Grab the ball and throw it into the goal, get a little distance on the shot and points go up, bounce off some platforms and you get a multiplier going. It's all pretty simple, but with double jumping and insane, simple pixel shapes leaping around, the frantic ball chasing is feverish. The ability to impact on the game by tweeting hashtags at a generated code for each match only adds another random element of hilarity.

Like the internet memes and social media it is inspired by and draws strength from, *#IDARB* can stretch thin in short order, losing its potency with time. It doesn't stop being an amusement, but the energy with which you and your friends will attack it may well begin to wane. Being able to generate your own characters and presumably seeing new hashtags shape the playing experience, as well as new stages being added to the game, may well give it a little shot in the arm down the road, but it won't add enough to really make this a long-term diversion.

FINGERPRINT

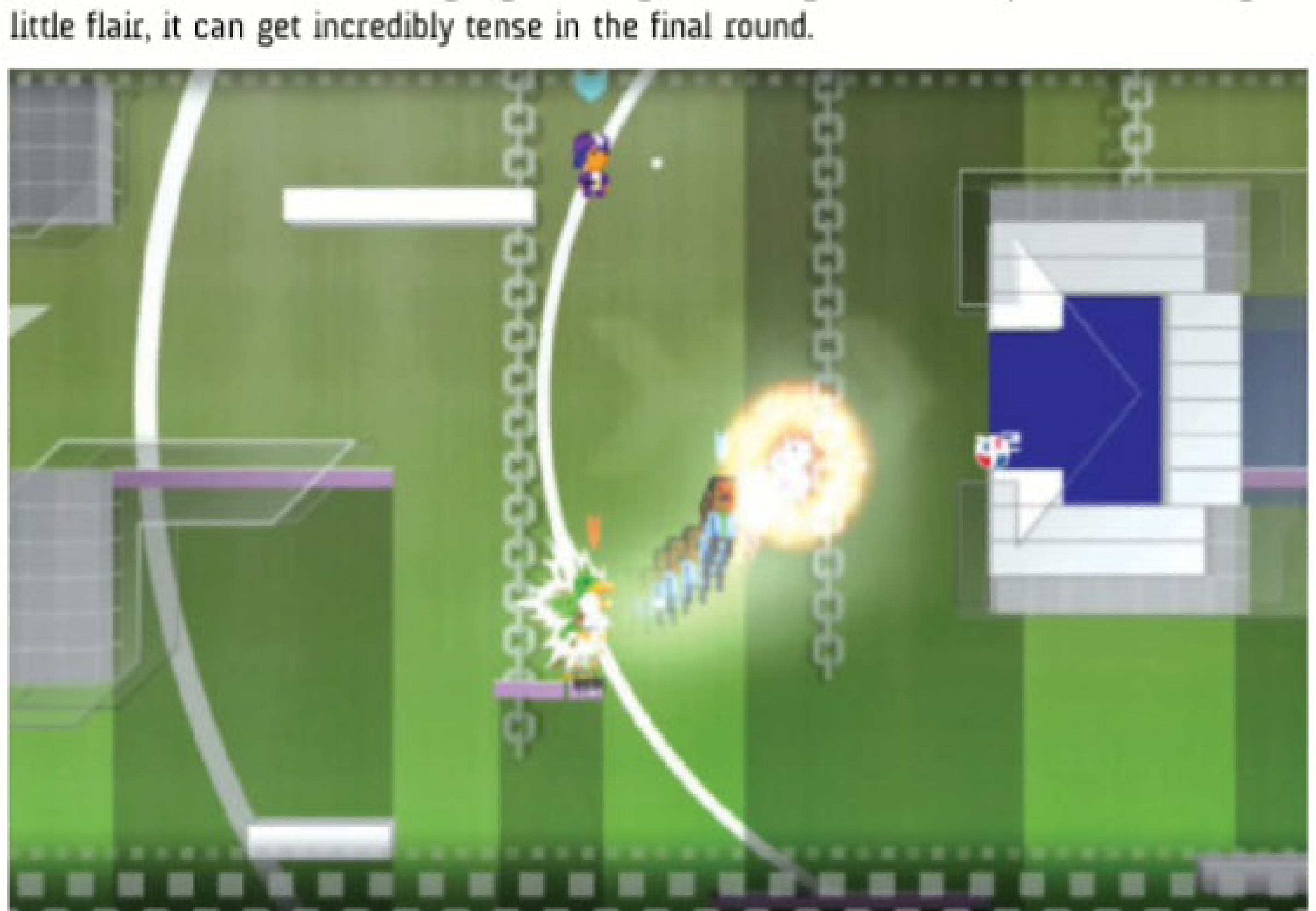
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

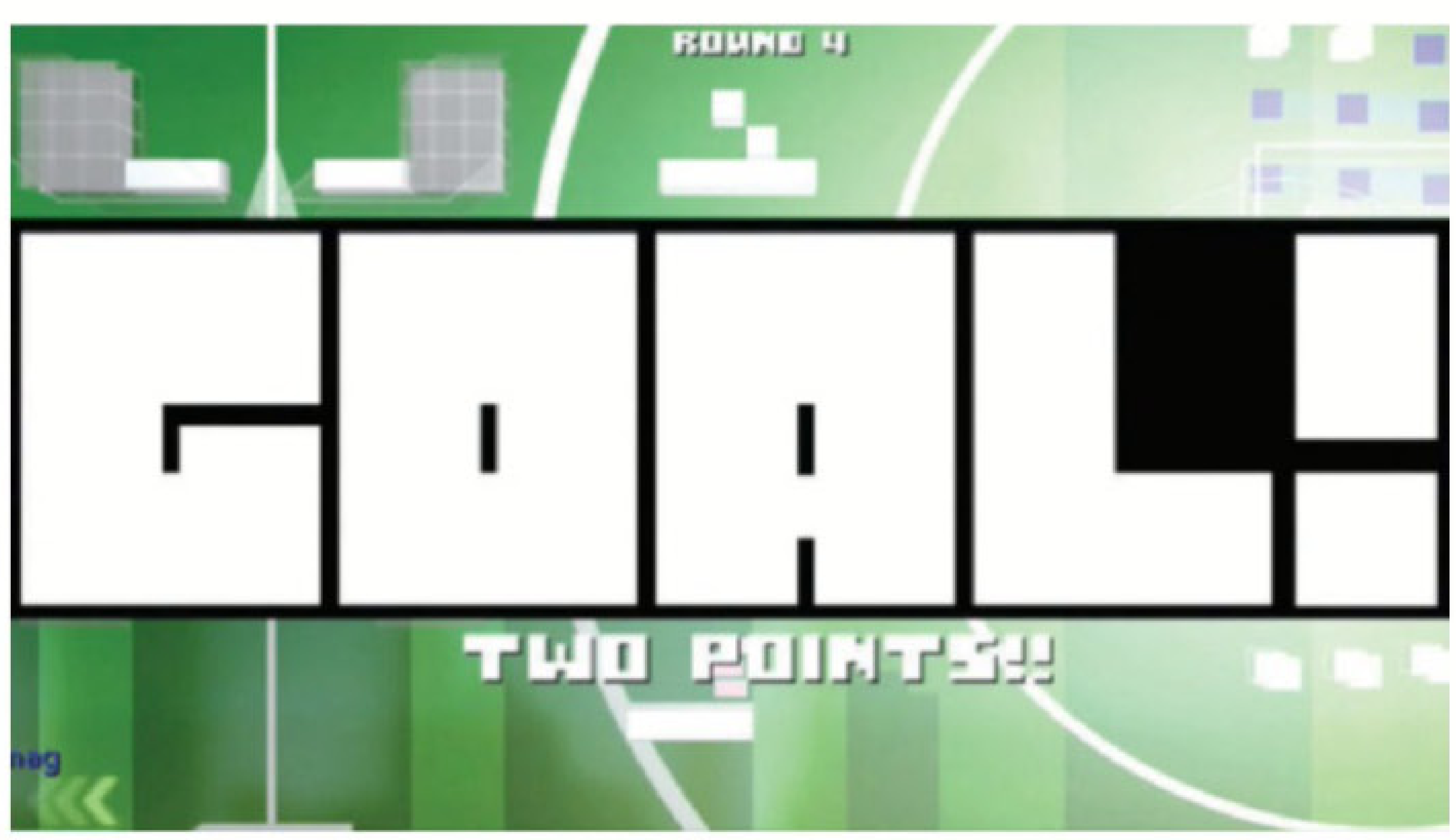
MASSIVELY LOCAL MULTIPLAYER: Playing *#IDARB* online is a lot of fun, as is a quick game with a few buddies, but eight controllers hooked up to the Xbox One simultaneously for live 4v4 action is insane.

While *#IDARB* has an undeniable spark of ingenuity and humour to it, it doesn't quite have the depth and variety of games of its kind like *Super Smash Bros.* It's *#IDARB*'s simplicity that holds it back, but it is also this quality that makes it so refreshing to pick up and play. So long as you keep finding new people to introduce it to, its irreverent brand of competition will keep delivering thrills for a while.

VERDICT 7/10
ALMOST INCOMPREHENSIBLY CHAOTIC, BUT GOOD FUN

Below: If you can actually manage to pull off a few passes and get the ball from teammate to teammate, scoring a goal is a great feeling. With bonus points for adding a little flair, it can get incredibly tense in the final round.





JUST AN ANALOGUE GIRL LIVING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Life Is Strange, Episode 1: Chrysalis

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: PS3, Xbox One, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: Dontnod Entertainment
PRICE: £13.99 (Season Pass)
RELEASE: Out now
GENRE: Episodic adventure
PLAYERS: 1

The first thing we noticed about *Life Is Strange* was the protagonist, Max Caulfield, and the fact that her surname is shared with *Catcher In The Rye*'s Holden Caulfield – the posterchild for teenage rebellion. Thing is, where J. D Salinger's Caulfield has an edge of deep-rooted anarchism and edginess to his rebellious streak, our Max is just a bit of a wet blanket – an 'emo' to use a passed parlance. She's self-deprecating at every turn, morose, unlikeable.

This got under our skin at first – this high-school photography student's relentless malaise drained us. Combined with her sluggish movement speed and a janky camera, it felt like *Life Is Strange* was intentionally trying to make us feel like we'd woken up in our dorm room with all the enthusiasm a dull 17 year old would have. It took about 20 minutes for us to change our minds and realise that maybe, just maybe, DONTNOD was doing all this intentionally.

Below: At first, you think Max is only defined by her passion for photography – but as the game goes on, you realise there's more to the girl, she's just fairly humble.

The intro to *Life Is Strange* is myopic – you begin in a tempest, watching the town of Arcadia (where you grew up, and have just returned to) get sucked into a windy vortex as a blinking lighthouse crumbles into the ocean. Max, in her already tiresome way, can't help but wonder why all this is happening to her. The top of the lighthouse falls on her head, and she wakes up. It was a dream – phew! – and she's in class. There's a teacher that looks too much like Jack Whitehall for his own good being pretentious about photography, and your apparent nemesis Victoria shamelessly flirts with him. You're in high school, all right…

Max begins her internal monologue – a pretty tepid affair throughout the game, and a really lazy example of signposting at times. When you're given control of an avatar like Max, and expected to pick your way through this new kind of point and click adventure, we understand it's hard to vocalise



Above: The game's obsession with photography is evident in the way it draws on a lot of photography theory, and the way it frames its shots.



DONTNOD DEMONSTRATES IT CAN FUSE THE DOMESTIC WITH THE SUPERNATURAL WITH A DEFT HAND





Above: The game's framework uses days of the week to count down to a calamity: it's your job to prevent that from happening.



THIS IS ONE PATH, THERE ARE MANY

Like most episodic games are doing nowadays, *Life Is Strange* presents you with a breakdown of the important decisions in the game after you've completed the first chapter – and we were surprised with the outcome. Granted, we'd completed it when only developers and other journalists had a run through the first episode, but people seemed to be far more amoral than we were. It's always interesting to come into the office and discuss branching games like this, but some of the discrepancies in *Life Is Strange* took us by surprise – what we thought were little nuanced moments actually had fairly large repercussions, even within the opening episode.



standard game prompts – 'No, I need to go here', 'I should really do *this* first' – but the dichotomy between these verbal cues and how realistically the game tries to be clashes at times, and ends up making the whole thing feel a bit weaker. Max succeeds in feeling a bit embarrassing at times, though, which we suppose is the intention – who of us can look back at their high-school self and *not* be embarrassed by how their thought processes worked?

When Max snaps out of her reveries, we get to wander around the white picket suburbia of Arcadia, and a familiar problem with episodic gaming returns – the dodgy assets. It's hard not to draw comparisons to Telltale's games – after all, they started this new adventure genre – but *Life Is Strange*'s characters bear a resemblance to the wooden manikins you'll see in *The Walking Dead* or *Game Of Thrones*. There are fewer glitches in Dontnod's effort, though, which is nice, and at least the sublime lighting over the autumnal setting makes up for some lacklustre textures. The overall art direction is outstanding – and clearly makes the most of the vertical slice composition you have to bear in mind when developing episodic titles. Technically, it's an impressive feat. (The lip-sync is awful, though, and is something else that impacts the game's attempt at reality).

FAQs

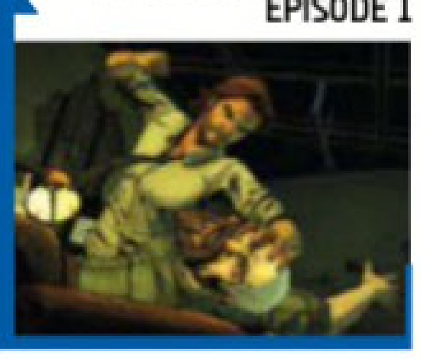
Q. WILL I CARE ABOUT THE CHARACTERS?
Not right away – we certainly didn't – but an unexpected monologue at the end and some great inter-character dynamics will make you by the end.

Q. WORTH THE MONEY?
At a measly £14 for the whole season, yes – this episode took us three hours to complete, and that's before getting all the collectibles.

Q. HOW'S THE SOUNDTRACK?
Amazing. To be fair to Dontnod, the studio's choice in specifically-picked hipster music is flawless. Dreamy acoustic melodies and sighing arpeggios abound.

BETTER THAN

THE WOLF AMONG US, EPISODE 1



WORSE THAN



GAME OF THRONES, EPISODE 1

Max's vortex nightmare gives her the power to manipulate time: anything she's touching or holding can travel with her, leading to some interesting (but ultimately simple) puzzles involving forced trial and error. We imagine that *Episode 1* is merely an introduction to how these powers can be used, though – we're hoping for some more cerebral applications of the whole thing as the story progresses.

Being able to insta-rewind like this opens up something new in the decision-making sim adventure game: if you decide *not* to help someone, and see the negative reaction that follows, you can flip back to before whatever incident occurs and try again. You'll still have to pick one, but it gives you a better opportunity to gauge your reactions – something that's still marked out to you by a notification in the top left of the screen. This is a handy power to have in day-to-day conversations, too: if you awkwardly bumble your way through a conversation and cock it up (oh, and you *will*), you can at least go back and give the person you're talking to the answer they gave *you* in the conversation. There's a very smug sense of satisfaction in doing that, too.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

IF I COULD TURN BACK TIME: The ability to rewind on a whim is not only interesting mechanically, but the HUD effects it plays with are incredibly pretty, too.

So *Life Is Strange* has us hooked – despite our initial resistance. It gets off to a slow start, and aside from the two core characters (Max and Chloe), everyone else in the game is pretty much detestable. It's like an exaggerated cartoon of American life, filtered through the romantic lens of Dontnod's French studio. This isn't a bad thing exactly – in fact, it aids in its unique-ness. It's like anarchic cartoon *Daria*, remade by Telltale's most hipster staff members. Yes, there is some *awful* dialogue, and yes, the actors all sound like they dropped out of A-level Drama classes, but the product overall is certainly more than the sum of its parts.

If you're after an episodic game that breaks away from the now-predictable template that Telltalle's games operate on, you could do far worse than *Life Is Strange*. Enigmatic in parts, frustrating in others, Dontnod demonstrates it can fuse the domestic with the supernatural with a deft hand, and succeeds in creating a pastel world brimming with intrigue in about three hours.

VERDICT 7/10

A COMPELLING AND WORTHY TELLTALE ALTERNATIVE

WINTER IS COMING

Total War: Attila

Right: Siege warfare requires patience and serious machinery but while weakening defences makes a city easier to capture it also makes it more expensive to repair. That's not a problem for the Huns, though, who simply raze each one after victory.



Despite its title, *Total War: Attila* is not the story of a single, ferocious military leader. Instead, it is a collection of stories from multiple disparate and unequal factions that range in size and scope, sporting wildly different skill-sets and cultural identities. At their core, these factions represent myriad play-styles across multiple game modes, all of which add up to the widest variety of scenarios for any base-game in the long-running *Total War* series. And Creative Assembly has covered a multitude of approaches right off the bat. Grand campaigns can start with managing the scores of settlements boasted by the Romans to the single town set-ups of the great migrators in what is, effectively, the same campaign story told from multiple viewpoints; a story that depicts the rise of smaller factions and the beginning of the end of the mighty Roman Empire.

For the Romans, this means holding on to as many settlements as possible, installing ruling provincial leaders and making advantageous alliances through trade and marriage, all the while adapting to changing circumstances. Friends become foes and internal strife boils over into localised pockets of rebellion as the downtrodden rage against the squalor brought about by years of decadent living enjoyed by their betters. New powers rise across the map bringing with them their own political time-bombs and military challenges, while the sheer number of fronts on which the Romans must defend themselves makes them amongst the toughest factions to play from the off; everyone wants a piece of the Roman Empire and control must be relinquished in some quarters in order to maintain order in others.

Not that life is much easier as a smaller faction. As one of the migratory tribes you'll feel the initial bite of the terrifying Huns as they bear down from the north, bringing with them a changing of the seasons. Winter slows movement on the campaign map and punishes armies caught out in the open, while life inside towns and cities is also affected by the fickle whim of Mother Nature where a bumper crop gifted by an unseasonably warm spring may be decimated by a particularly harsh winter. When life gets too tough you can pack up and migrate, scorching the earth you leave behind and turning your faction into a travelling horde. In this way, the faction system has been applied far more effectively than in previous games and makes a genuine difference to how you play and to how different cultures behave.

Nonetheless, at some point you have to stand and fight. Meeting the Huns on open ground is dangerous due to their multitude of mounted units that can quickly outflank, outmanoeuvre and outrun ground troops, harrying superior numbers and making light of any units that you allow to be isolated. Use of cover – forests in open warfare or blind alleys and densely packed buildings in city scraps – is essential for maintaining the element of surprise. Here too,

DETAILS

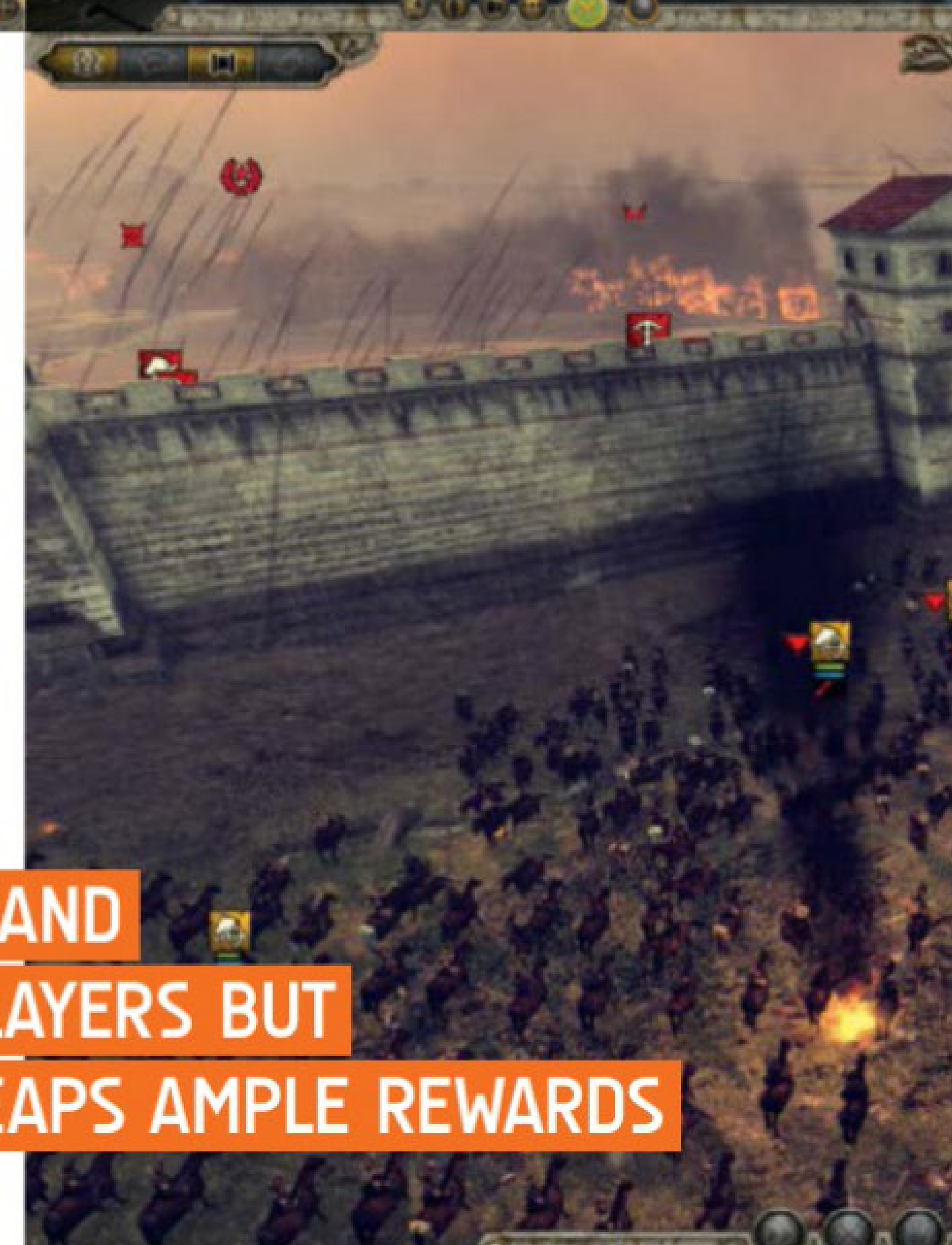
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: The Creative Assembly
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 (2-8 Online)
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows Vista, Intel Core 2 Duo 3 GHz, 3 GB RAM, 512 MB NVIDIA GeForce 8800 GT, AMD Radeon HD 2900 XT or Intel HD 4000, DirectX 10, HDD35 GB available space
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



Above: *Attila* never reaches *Game of Thrones*' level of intrigue but it's not beyond having the most devious leaders plot against members of their own family and it's even possible to have them quietly taken care of. You win or you die, right?







Right: Turns can take a while, even early on, as the AI clicks through all 56 factions, be they visible on the world map or hidden amidst the fog of war.

TOTAL WAR: ATTILA CAN BE DAUNTING AND SOMETIMES FRUSTRATING FOR NEW PLAYERS BUT EVENTUALLY THE TIME INVESTMENT REAPS AMPLE REWARDS





FAQs

Q. CAN I PLAY ATTILA?
Absolutely. The ferocious Hun can be selected for skirmishes or campaign.

Q. IS IT ALL FIGHTING?
No it's not. Creative Assembly has developed the political and city-management systems.

Q. BEST FACTION TO START?
The Sassanids have the easiest opening to the campaign but the Visigoths offer a balanced approach to the first few hours.



WORLDWIDE DOMINATION

Multiplayer offers simple, one-off battles across a range of environments or the longer term investment required of the multiplayer campaign. Due to the variation in starting size and power of the factions it's a good idea to play as broadly similar cultures. Otherwise, someone playing a single-city barbarian state can face a long wait each turn as a player-controlled Roman faction sees to its empire. Turn-times can be limited in the game set-up but it's hard to find a happy medium between a penniless nomadic tribe and a well-established faction bringing in thousands of gold per turn. Alternatively, the co-op campaign offers players a chance to team-up to plot their rise to dominance and share resources as they take out the AI super-powers.



weather plays a part as an attacking force can choose to wait for more favourable conditions or plough into the fray, regardless. Trying to defend a newly established settlement against superior numbers is hard enough; doing so in heavy fog is akin to fighting two foes at once.

Despite this, early battles can be won simply by grouping troops and throwing them at the enemy and victory in the early battles can come seemingly out of the blue, with the killing of a rival general leading to widespread panic within the enemy ranks. Fail to rout them, however, and they may soon rally and return to cause problems. Later, better recognised tactics take over as you move troops around more efficiently and to greater effect although it's here that new players will find that the lack of education concerning the individual strengths and uses of each unit causes an avoidable defeat or two as you experiment with each. In time, you come to understand that a bigger army is not necessarily a better one, particularly in settlements where a smaller force is more effective and easier to move around. Similarly, the aide that serves as a guide for much of the early game abruptly stops being helpful partway through the campaign and so it is left to you to ascertain how best to leverage political situations or trade advantages

This points to the fact that it's not all fighting and sometimes you'll have to launch a charm offensive to supplement your military might. Suppression by the sword is blunt and to the point and so it can be advantageous to placate aggressive neighbours or internal agitators by winning public opinion and maintaining public order with coin or culturally beneficial buildings. Diplomatic wrangling can be complex and while you can drill down via the UI to get more info on any of the buildings or game concepts, you'll learn best through doing and exploring. This can be daunting and sometimes frustrating for new players but eventually the time investment reaps ample rewards.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

A LITTLE MORE IMMEDIATE DETAIL: *Total War* veterans will feel right at home with the majority of game concepts but a more focused tutorial would greatly benefit new players.

Ultimately, this is the lasting impression of *Total War: Attila*, which in the fifteenth year of the series feels like a celebration of the franchise and more of a game for *Total War* fans rather than one that's overly welcoming to brand new recruits. By building on the solid base that it took time to establish with *Total War: Rome 2*, Creative Assembly has refined a number of that game's rough edges and built upon its systems to deliver what many expected of its 2013 outing. New players will struggle at first but for those willing to invest the time, *Total War: Attila*'s deep pockets repay that investment with a varied and deep campaign and a plethora of additional content.

VERDICT 8/10
THE ROAD TO VICTORY IS A LONG ONE



Below: Using a keyboard and mouse combo would be easier, but the adapting radial menu and command-based structure means it's never quite as intuitive as simply saying the orders – even if that does take a little longer.



RESONATE WITH AN AUDIENCE

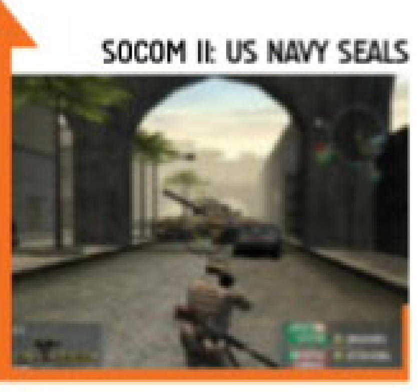
There Came An Echo

DETAILS

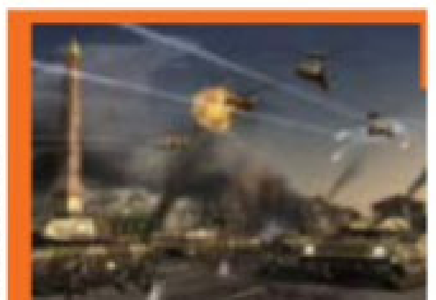
FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PS4, Xbox One
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Iridium Studios
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £11.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: 2GHz Dual Core CPU, 2GM RAM, 256MB GPU, 5GB HDD Space
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS

SOCOM II: US NAVY SEALS



WORSE THAN



TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR

It's always important to cherish innovation. Gaming – more than any other entertainment medium – thrives on its own potential, growing alongside the technological advances of the time. And so it's important to recognise innovation for what it is, because though it might not always succeed, it's worth the recognition that at least someone *tried*. That, sadly, is the case for *There Came An Echo*, a game whose clear purpose is to enable a new way of playing by commanding units in an RTS situation with the power of the voice. Yes, *you* are that echo.

The structure of the game is simple enough: you'll encounter a series of stages viewed from an isometric viewpoint where you guide your squad members from cover to cover, directing their aim at packs of enemies, picking their weapons and even telling them when to reload. There's a host of recognisable names for the voice acting – so recognisable they take up a large portion of the opening, in fact – and this helps make for a compelling storyline. Pretty much every character maintains that 'quirky' sense of ambivalent sarcasm that is oh-so-popular in gaming these days, but there's enough distinction to make them compelling all the same.

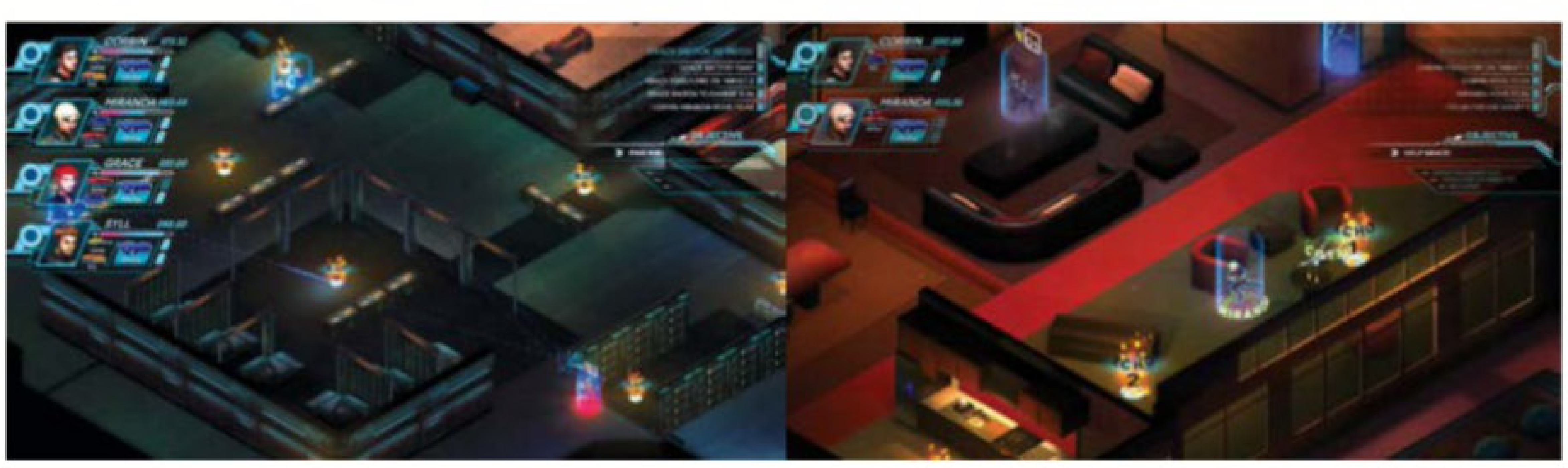
The problem comes in the battles themselves. Due to the voice-driven nature of the game, everything is command based so while it does mean you have a more immediate control over the combat, it actually ends up a little too fast-paced to be manageable. There are moments – such as when you have the initiative to begin a gunfight – where it does feel empowering. Issuing a set of individual weapon swaps, targets and move commands to exact on your say so makes for a subtle sort of thrill as you watch the different characters race into action on your mark. Similarly there are moments in the game when they'll directly refer to you, and if you respond, they will in kind; ignore for a second that you're sat alone in the dark talking to fictional characters and you'll find yourself drawn in by the directness of your input. But it's all rather bumblesome after that initial spurt: you need distinct pauses between different commands, and events happen just a little too quickly to be manageable through voice commands. Detection works more often than not, but if you're hoping to manage every action – and on harder difficulties you'll need to – then there are just too many orders to give to make sure you survive.

It's possible to use a mouse and keyboard, too, but this just highlights the problem further. Here it's even more finicky since it retains its command-based design, so – for example – you're right-clicking a waypoint to move to, choosing an option from a menu and letting the programmed voice call it out for you – an unnecessary, obtuse equivalent to simply clicking the spot you want to move to. It only draws closer attention to the fact that voice control just isn't an improved method of input over just pointing at something and making it happen, but the effort is a worthy one.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

TIME TEAM: All it needs to make the voice commands more manageable is an option to pause time (rather than a pause menu), since it'd give you the breathing space to do what you need to.



Above: Combat is more akin to a real-time puzzle than strategy. You're never really using tactics to overcome a situation, more finding the right solution to the problem presented to you. If the battles were a little less rushed, it might've maintained a more strategic element.

VERDICT 6/10
INNOVATION FOR THE SAKE OF INNOVATION

CAN YOU DIG IT... A GRAVE?

Funk Of Titans

Below: Your weapons can include things like giant ears of corn, machetes and lightstabers, and you can opt to dress like Batman, Jason Voorhees or a moustached man about town. Wacky.



To sit and play *Funk Of Titans* is to sit and ask seemingly hundreds of exasperated questions about it, but the most imperative of them all – what on earth is this low-rent iOS game doing on Xbox One – can be answered simply by glancing at its developer's portfolio. *Funk Of Titans* doesn't even fleetingly look or feel like it belongs on a home console, and doesn't even look as good as the iOS game that the Spanish studio behind it made previously. Stale two-button runners like this are available on the App Store by the thousand, but the fact that this purports to be "about" a specific genre of music is arguably the biggest insult of all: if ever there was a game to be played with the volume down, this is it.

There's no funk music here whatsoever, just a gurning dope of a hero who endlessly spouts the same few aggravating jive catchphrases over and over again. There's no Pop, Rock or Rap music either; those being the titles of each of the game's three worlds. Here's the skinny, daddy-o: you press A to jump and X to slash, which is a move that instantly kills the momentum that runners are supposed to inherently offer you. What's more, all of the environments feel like they've been designed using scraps from other projects. Sometimes you're running through what looks like a futuristic swampland, sometimes you're in ancient Greece and sometimes you're flying through a baby blue sky-world of hamburgers, cupcakes and floating cutlery… Nothing comes together coherently.

Backgrounds and sizeable chunks of level design are re-used to extend the experience to a paltry three hours, the boss encounters consist of six laughably simple quick-time events (some of which are just duplicates of others) and the whole thing is just downright faulty; the only saving grace being that hitting the Xbox button to bring up the dashboard menu almost always unwittingly remedies lock-ups and crashes.

Some of the levels are almost five minutes long but there are no checkpoints whatsoever, and you die after taking just two hits; which means that if you randomly take a hit early on (and that is something that can literally occur at random) the smartest response always involves suicide. That said, if your initial hit was taken in a section designed to immediately hurl you straight from one hazard into another, you're killed on the spot, which nullifies one of the core systems of the game. That happens a lot.

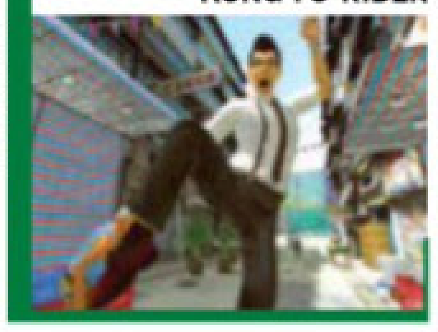
Even if you could play *Funk Of Titans* on your phone, for free, it is so ludicrously sketchy and tedious that it would still be impossible to recommend. So on Xbox One, for the positively gaudy introductory asking price? No way, José.

DETAILS

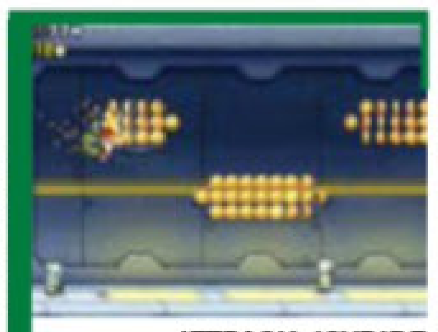
FORMAT: Xbox One
ORIGIN: Spain
PUBLISHER: A Crowd of Monsters
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £9.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS

KUNG FU RIDER



WORSE THAN



JETPACK JOYRIDE

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

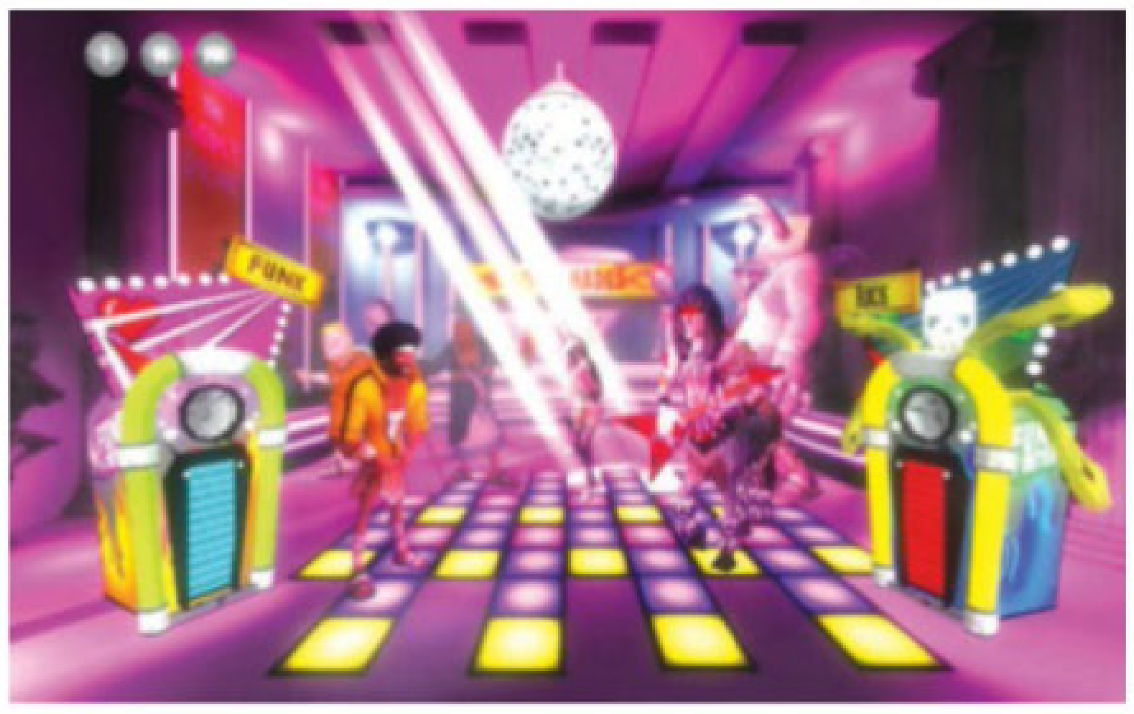
VANISHING PROMPTS: Not only are there situations in which the jump button stops working altogether, another prevalent bug involves button prompts disappearing from the screen during QTEs.

VERDICT 3/10

CUT IT ABSOLUTELY NO SLACK, JACK







Above: The bonus level – and yes, there is just the one – takes the form of a ropey *Jetpack Joyride* ripoff. One of your in-game assignments, required to unlock new weapons, involves crashing five times during it. Even that isn't fun.

CONQUER A NATION VERY, VERY SLOWLY

Blackguards 2





Above: Fighting the Creators in their astral planes is always a high-risk/high-reward scenario. If you charge in without thinking, you're dead.

It would be unkind to say that *Blackguards 2* doesn't offer much improvement over its predecessor. Battles are more rewarding, the pen-and-paper RPG elements have been scaled back, and you can unlock advanced combat moves sooner. Other elements, like a uncooperative camera, the tedious pacing of battle and mountainous difficulty spikes, remain unchanged.

To its credit, *Blackguards 2* leaps into its story of estranged spouses, imprisonment, mutilation and vengeance with wild abandon. It's a lot more gripping than the wanted criminal plotline from *Blackguards* and this time you're at the head of a conquering horde. Our protagonist, Cassia, is a breath of fresh air as a tyrant's abused wife who decides she could do a better job. How merciful or brutal she is will be left up to players. This ties into numerous choice and consequence scenarios. You might save some townspeople from being hanged and earn their gratitude, only for a few villains to turn up and harass your troops later on. Defeated enemies can give you information, allowing you to bypass a stronghold's defences or neutralise a major threat.

Blackguards 2 is focused squarely on its turn-based tactical combat. Towns and cities are not open regions for exploration, but glorified tableaus with clickable icons for merchants, companion chatter and information. Players are expected to upgrade their stats and their equipment, then move on to the next fight. The combat hasn't really been revised, instead given a few pleasing tweaks here and there. Background dice-rolling is now visible via the Battlelog and, should they not find the abilities wheel to their liking, players can shelve each troop's abilities on a tailored hotkey bar.

This is all very nice, but other problems have gone unaddressed. The hex-based grid demands a camera that is both rotational and able to zoom in. Cautiously hovering the mouse between enemies, friendly units and interactive objects feels less like tactical RPG warfare and more like brain surgery. And brain surgery takes hours. There's no way to speed up unit animations once their actions have been selected, nor is there any getting around lengthy waiting times for enemies to move.

Some fights require players to figure out a process, a puzzle of sorts, which inevitably results in much trial, error and frustration. As your army marches over the world, Cassia's husband will push back every few moves with an attempt to retake an outpost or city. That's when your mercenaries get to play defence. It's a decent change of pace and allows you to wreak vengeance on maps whose obstacles left you seething with rage. *Blackguards 2* has a lot to keep turn-based strategy enthusiasts occupied, though it fails to outshine the more complex games in the genre.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

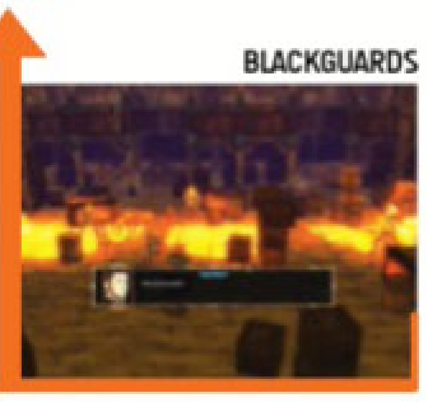
DODGE THIS: The 'unrealistic' dice-rolls that had units missing melee attacks are a thing of the past

I'M RICH: Swag dropped on the battlefield, including experience points and gear, is far more generous.

DETAILS

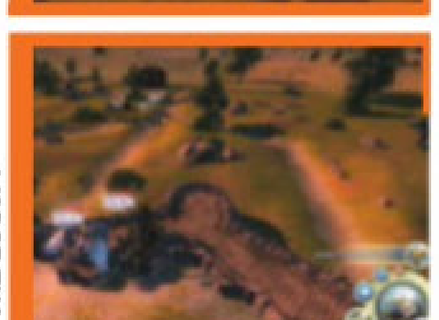
FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: Mac
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: Daedalic Entertainment
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINUMUM SPEC: Windows XP 32 bit, 2GHz Dual Core, 4GB RAM, 12GB available space, nVidia GeForce 8600/GT, ATI Radeon HD 2600 XT, DirectX 9.0c, DirectX 9.0c compatible sound card with latest drivers.

BETTER THAN



BLACKGUARDS

WORSE THAN

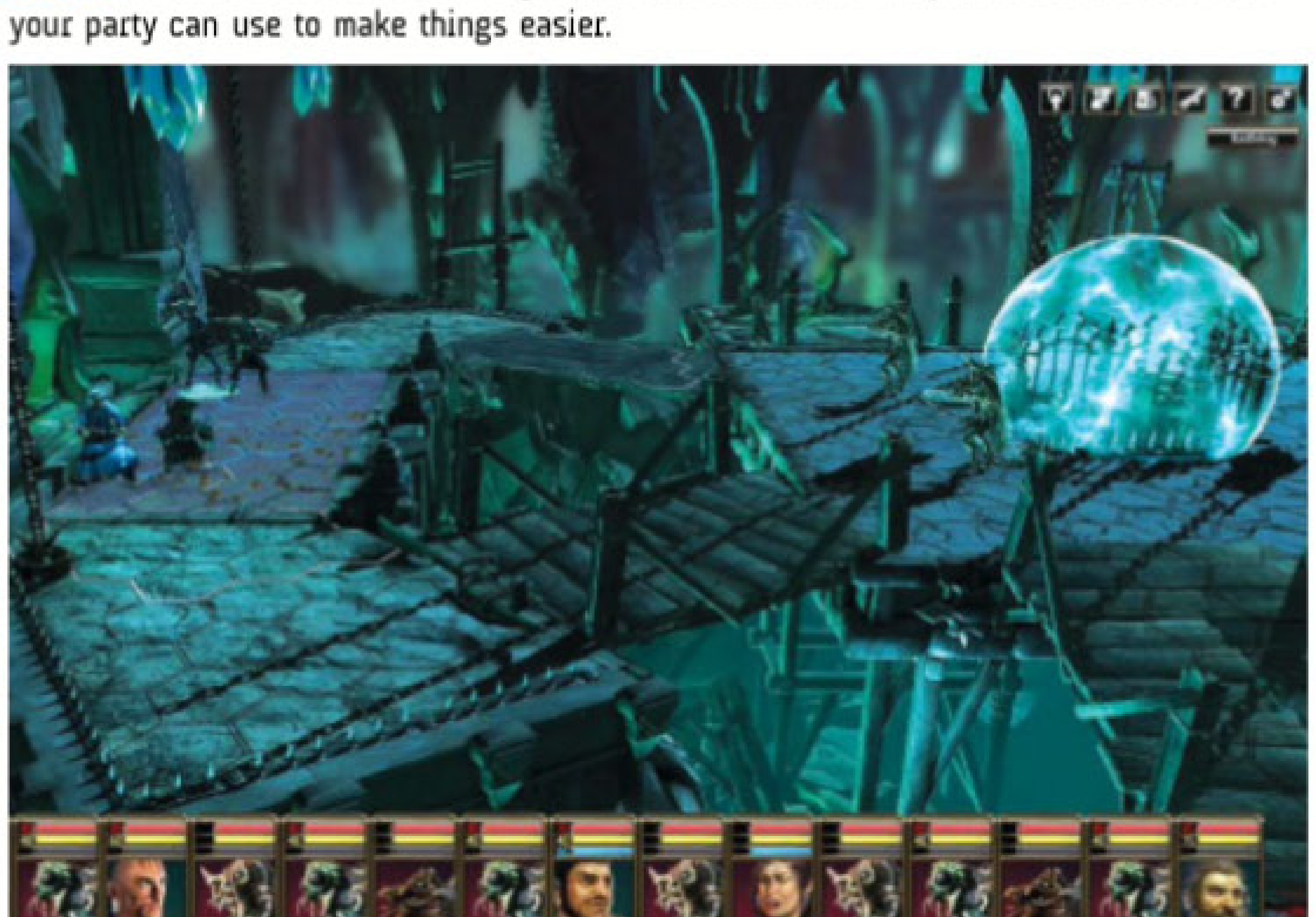


AGE OF WONDERS 3

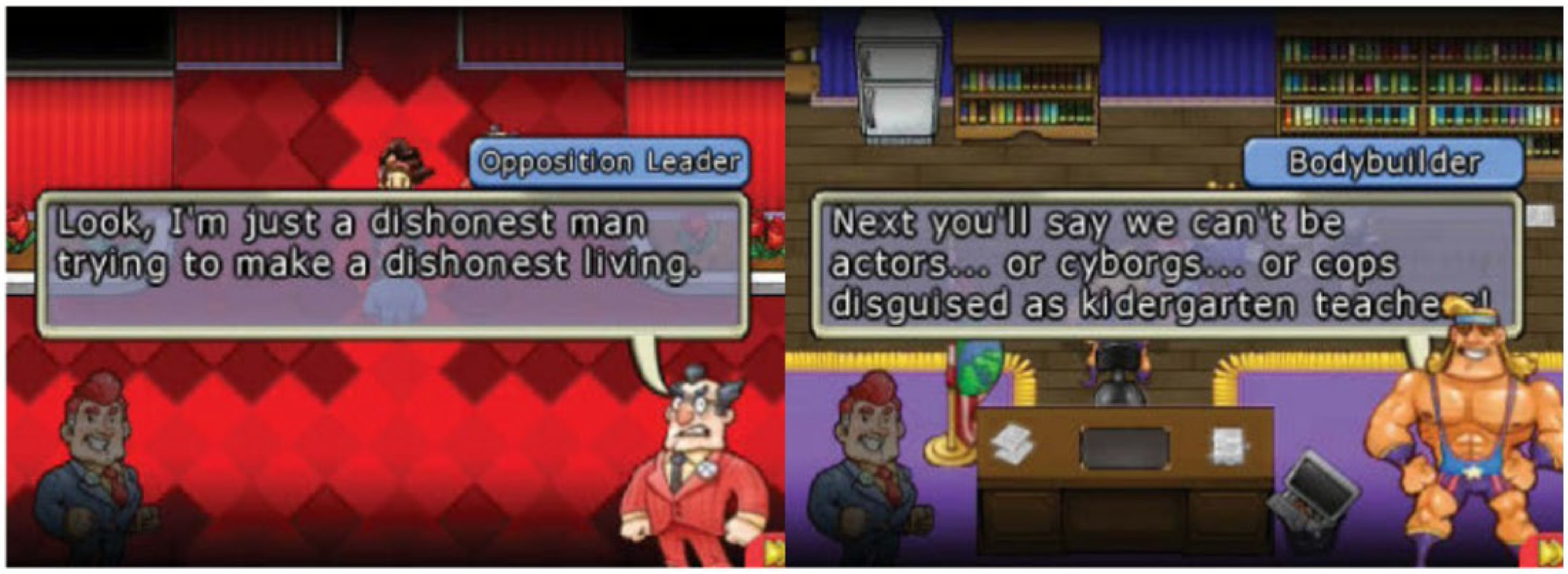
VERDICT 7/10

A SERIES OF CORRECTIONS RATHER THAN A SEQUEL

Below: All battle locations are nicely varied and some have unique interactive elements your party can use to make things easier.







Left: Each of the 40 recruitable citizens has a different occupation that influences their battle style. The bodybuilder has a number of pose moves that buff his own stats but, being a selfish sod, doesn't have any that help other party members.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF VICE SQUAD

Citizens Of Earth

Originally a Kickstarter project that fell significantly short of its target, *Citizens Of Earth* had a revive spell cast on it by RPG specialist Atlus, ensuring gamers would be able to enjoy this quirky parody of *Earthbound* after all. Players step into the over-polished shoes of the vice-president of Earth, who wants to investigate the numerous strange incidents cropping up nearby but feels he's far too important to get his hands dirty. The aim, then, is to recruit fellow townsfolk – starting with your own mother and brother – and get them to join your cause, fighting on your behalf while you shout encouragement from the sidelines.

The game's visual style is certainly refreshing but while its characters and locations look crisp on the HD versions of the game, the move to 3DS results in slightly blurry sprites, especially on the XL. Meanwhile, a complete lack of 3D means anyone who recently upgraded to the New 3DS won't get to try out its improved stereographic capabilities. More consistent is the brilliant dialogue, which is genuinely funny and had us regularly chuckling with its onslaught of groanworthy puns and its generous helping of top-notch voice acting.

Part of its humour is down to the wide variety of characters featured, most notably the 40 different citizens who can be recruited *Pokémon*-style to your squad of three as the game progresses. It's a testament to the battle system's design that each feels genuinely different, so having the baker in your team may require a different strategy than if you had the conspiracy theorist in his place.

Eventually the honeymoon period ends and the game's charm gives way to a number of notable niggles. The enemies, though well designed, soon become repetitive and although the battles are nippy affairs with mercifully brief transition animations it can still become tiresome wading through areas populated with identikit foes.

The lack of a proper map system also becomes irritating. Although the bottom screen provides a general overview of your current area, it's far too lacking in detail to be of any real use and the player will often find themselves wandering around trying to solve vague mission clues like "demonstrate your strength as an elected official".

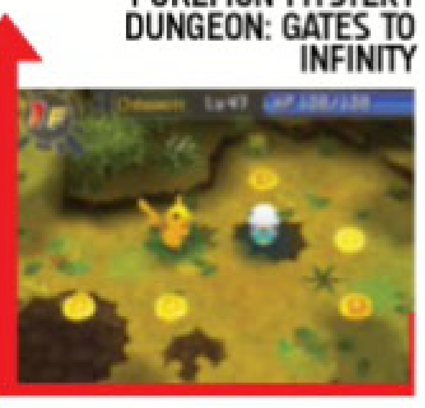
Technical issues make an unwelcome appearance; the occasional juddery frame-rate is forgivable but we had the game outright crash on us on at least four separate occasions during our playthrough. For some, *Citizens Of Earth* will be worth playing through on the strength of its humour alone, but the myriad of technical and design flaws that make the experience more frustrating than it needs to be are certainly no joke.

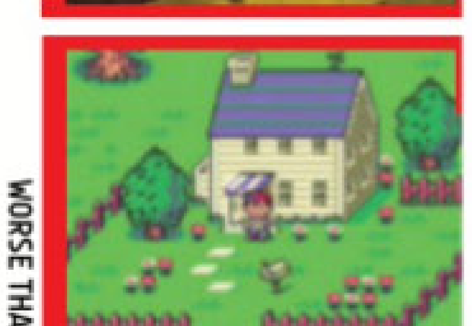
VERDICT 6/10
FUNNY YET FRUSTRATING IN EQUAL MEASURES

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Wii U, PS4, Vita, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Atlus
DEVELOPER: Eden Industries
PRICE: £9.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN
POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: GATES TO INFINITY

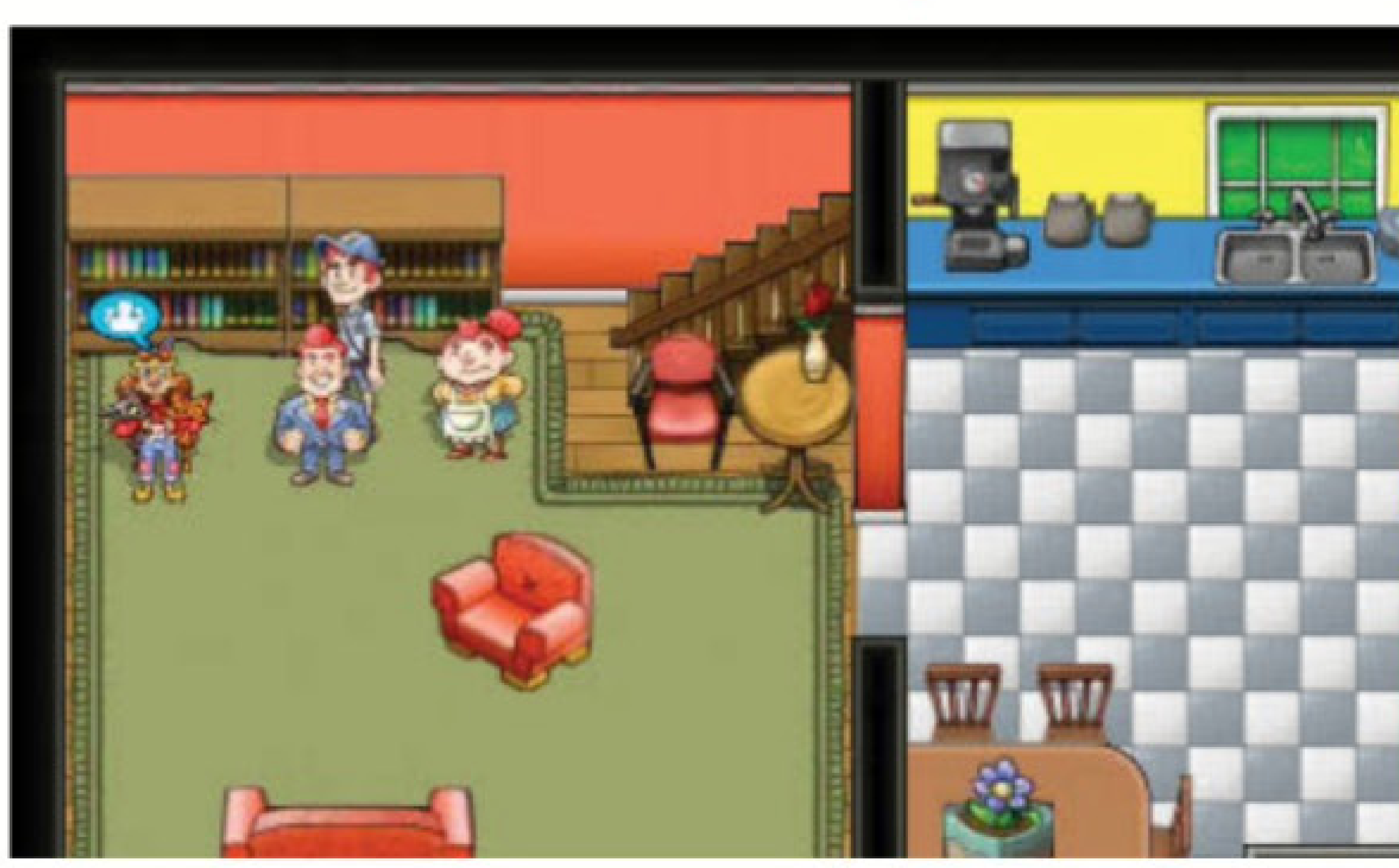




WORSE THAN
EARTHBOUND

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BATTLE SYSTEM: Weak attacks give energy to be used for strong ones, making you vary your moves.
ODD ENEMIES: We're pretty sure this is the first time we've ever fought against evil mutated coffee.



Above: Most citizens are found in the game's opening town but need specific tasks completed. You won't have a full roster to choose from until well into the game's seven-chapter story.



A LITTLE LIGHT PUZZLING

Shadowmatic

Have you been getting into 'zen gaming'? Apparently it's a bit of a thing for mobile device games. We must have missed out on this trend a little while back, although there have been some reasonable examples in recent years. *Shadowmatic* leaps into this realm with a very chilled-out soundtrack and a singular focus to its shadow-manipulating gameplay.

The point, then, is it's supposed to be quite a relaxing game to play, and we wouldn't argue with that. Moving the abstract shapes around to form different outlines of recognisable objects, animals and shapes is a quiet and calming time. Or at least it is up to the point you're flinging the shapes around trying to find the right shadow on the wall because the shape seems so arbitrary. Suddenly the calm veneer cracks a little at that point.

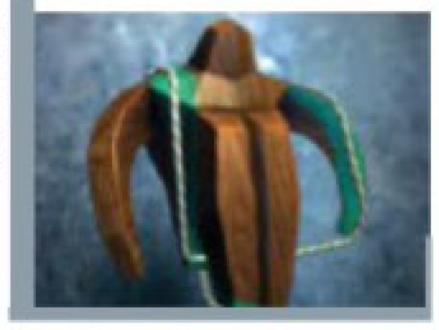
Thankfully, the hint function (if you feel the need to use it) can help mitigate that frustration and increasingly guide you towards the answer before finally just giving you the shape you're trying to match. It can get very fiddly, though, as *Shadowmatic* can be very demanding about how close you get before it considers a shadow finished. Finding that perfect alignment is not entirely unlike getting the right dial setting in the shower or when making toast. Neither experiences are something we would have associated with zen states of internal wellbeing

Ultimately, though, as well made and actually quite good-looking as this game is, that singular focus is really what holds this game back from being anything more than okay. There's no great depth or immersion to it as an experience. What you see is all that you get. With a wide variety of puzzle games of this type, often with much more variety and greater challenge, *Shadowmatic* is a limited game and one you could find more involving examples of for mobile devices.

DETAILS

FORMAT: iOS
ORIGIN: Armenia
PUBLISHER: Triada Studio
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £2.29
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS: ZEN BOUND 2 UNIVERSAL

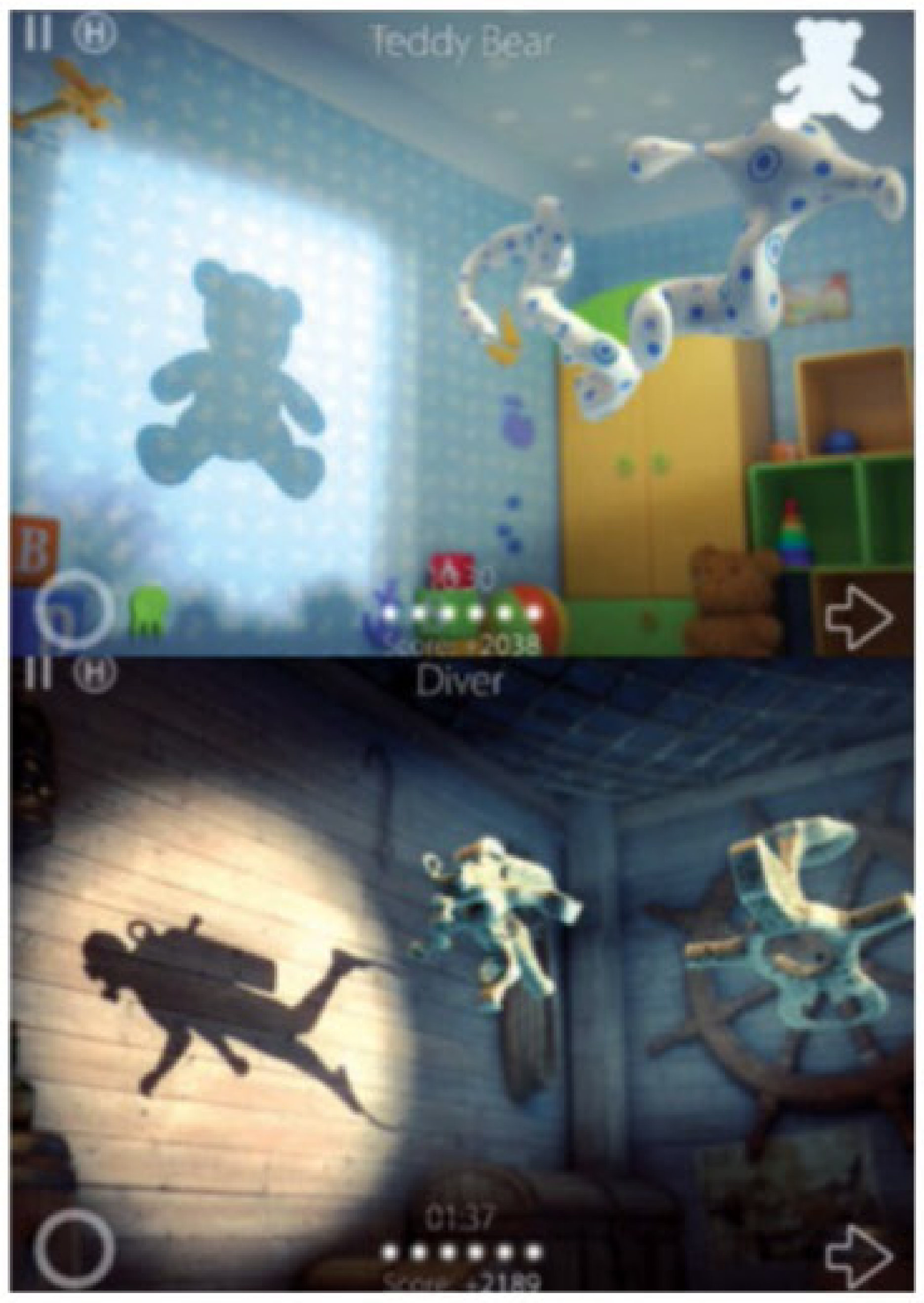


WORSE THAN: THE ROOM



VERDICT 5/10
SIMPLE AND STYLISH, BUT HARDLY DEEP

Below: The room setting and sometimes the shape and colouring of the objects can give you a clue as to what realm of item you're attempting to find.



DETAILS

FORMAT: iOS
OTHER FORMATS: Android
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: CD Projekt Red
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: Free
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-6
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

WE HAD BEEN HOPING FOR SOMETHING BIGGER

The Witcher Battle Arena

There we were, minding our own business, waiting for *The Witcher 3* when all of a sudden, a new *Witcher* game came out. Except it's a MOBA. On mobile devices. With touch controls. And it's free-to-play. With in-app purchases. This wasn't the game we were hoping for.

But it actually isn't half bad. In fact it's half good, which when you combine all of the above should come as a pleasant surprise. We can't deny that CD Projekt has done the unlikely and made a pretty solid multiplayer action game for tablets and smartphones here. What's more, it does free-to-play right, which should come as no shock from a developer that's supporting its upcoming game with buckets of free DLC and believes in delivering DRM-free games for PC. Yes, you can buy new skins, characters and weapons with real money, but they can also be unlocked with in-game currency, earned by playing the game, and they don't appear to have any impact on stats. Those are purely down to your playing skill as you unlock buffs after each battle.

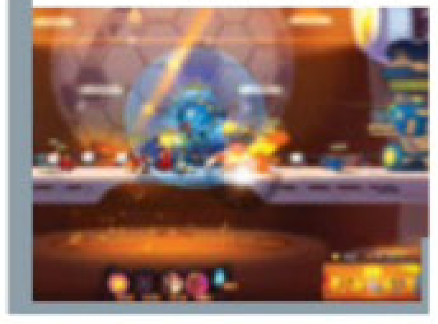
So far, so good, but that's just the trappings. The meat of the game is fairly solid too, if relatively basic to compensate for being on mobile devices. The three versus three combat of the single capture mode keeps things from being too chaotic on the small screens of a smartphone, but with only two maps currently, it can still feel a little repetitive until you start unlocking some new heroes and gear. Finding the right paths, spotting item's drop points and generally playing a little more thoughtfully does start to add to things though as you get with the pace of the game.

CD Projekt Red has kept *The Witcher Battle Arena* a tight affair and that makes it limited, but doesn't mean it lacks fun. The touch controls start off feeling a little detached, but it will grow on you. The only issue really is a potential lack of depth beyond the short term, but there's a promise of more content on the way, and it's not as if it costs you anything for the time being.

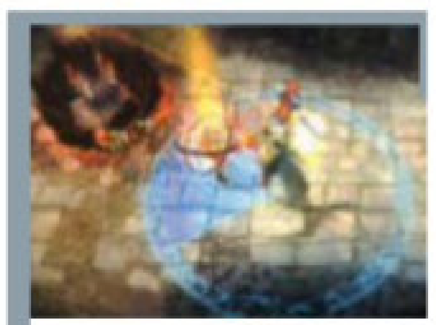
Below: Even between characters of the same class, there's a nice variety of special abilities so everyone feels like they have something different to bring to the fight, even if you double up on one class.




BETTER THAN: AWESOMENAUTS



WORSE THAN: GUARDIANS OF MIDDLE-EARTH



VERDICT 7/10
AS MOBILE MOBAS GO, IT'S ONE OF THE BEST



"I just think Ocarina Of Time, for me, is probably one of the best-designed games ever made"

NICK BURCOMBE, PLAYRISE GAMES, WIPEOUT CREATOR



WHY I ♥...

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

NICK BURCOMBE, PLAYRISE GAMES, WIPEOUT CREATOR

“I think the most enjoyable and satisfying game to involve yourself in, to have completed, and sat back and reset it, and recompleted it time and time again has got to be Ocarina Of Time*. It’s a piece of design that I am in awe of, to be honest. I think it’s absolutely a perfect adventure, it’s so well thought through, it’s so well put together. I have to say, I didn’t get on as well with* Majora’s Mask *after that. I just think* Ocarina Of Time*, for me, is probably one of the best-designed games ever made. It’s not a genre I’m likely to go into, but I understand how it’s put together and why it’s built the way it is, but it’s an incredible piece of software. I mean, long live Zelda! What a fantastic franchise that is. I’m in absolute awe of that level of design, gameplay design, game mechanics design, the way they integrated it with the N64 controller. Everything about it is perfect, it’s a wonderful piece of software.”*

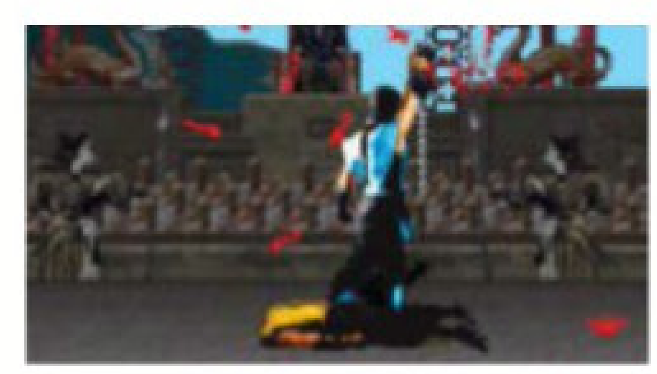
RETRO

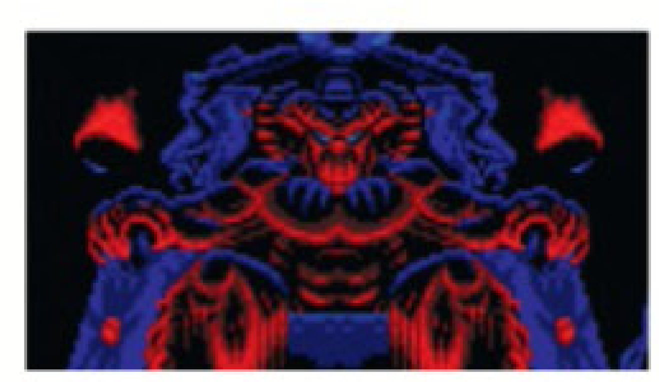
NO.158











DISCUSS | Have your say on all things retro on our dedicated forum **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum**



THE RETRO GUIDE TO... FINAL FANTASY

The leading name in Japanese RPGs, Final Fantasy has enjoyed a rich and varied run, spanning nearly three decades, and serving up some genuine all-time classics along the way

IT'S AMAZING TO think that one final act of desperation on behalf of a developer losing faith in gaming as a medium managed to spawn one of the longest-running franchises, but that's exactly what happened. Today, *Final Fantasy* is the biggest franchise in the JRPG arena and one of Japan's most successful ever gaming exports, enjoying a level of success that few other series can boast. The upcoming *Final Fantasy XV* might suggest that only 14 games have come before it, but the actual number – as you're about to discover – is significantly greater. Hop on your chocobo and let's get this epic quest underway…

FINAL FANTASY 1987

SYSTEM: NES

Squaresoft's Hironobu Sakaguchi had long been petitioning his bosses to let him make an RPG, but it wasn't until Enix saw success with *Dragon Quest* in 1986 that Squaresoft finally saw that there was indeed a market for console RPGs and green-lit the project. While it shared a lot tonally and in terms of setting with *Dragon Quest*, Western influences from the likes of *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Wizardry* offered deeper character progression and combat elements that would go on to become staples of the franchise, as well as introducing many to the outstanding scoring of Nobuo Uematsu. The game's title reflected not only Squaresoft's financial instability at the time but also Sakaguchi's own sentiments – had the game flopped, he reportedly planned to leave gaming altogether. While its failure could have taken its parent company down with it, the game's initial print run of 200,000 copies had to be doubled to meet demand. It has since been re-released no less than 17 times across various platforms, finally arriving in Europe for the first time in 2003 on PSone.



FINAL FANTASY II 1988

SYSTEM: NES

After the unexpected success of the original game, Sakaguchi and his team were tasked with turning around a speedy sequel in order to fully capitalise on its popularity. Despite arriving within a year of the first game's release, *FFII* still managed to take some bold strides forward – battle scenes were no longer so heavily windowed and felt more dynamic as a result, while franchise staples such as chocobo mounts and recurring character Cid also made their debut here. Since the US release of the original was something of a flop commercially, this sequel would not be localised for the first time until 2003, for PlayStation compilation *Final Fantasy Origins*.







FINAL FANTASY III 1990

SYSTEM: NES

Clearly onto a winner in Japan, Square continued to churn out sequels but again, this was far more than a simple cash grab. *FFIII* further refined the series' battle system, doing away with damage details as captions and instead working them into the visual representation of the fight, in turn allowing more space for the improved combat graphics to shine. The original's job system was greatly improved by allowing all playable characters to switch between multiple roles unlocked as the game progressed, lending players a degree of customisation and personalisation they had not enjoyed up to this point. It was also the first game to feature summons. Once again, though, no localisation was available until long after release – in this case, it took until the 2006 DS remake for an official non-Japanese version to be launched.





FINAL FANTASY IV 1991

SYSTEM: SNES

Here's where it starts to get a little complicated. With only the original game having been available in the US, this SNES debut instead released as *Final Fantasy II* so as to avoid confusion. Working with new hardware proved to be a double-edged sword for the team – the overly ambitious script came in at around four times too long for what the capacity of the cartridge would allow, although the improved fidelity would allow character emotions to be conveyed visually to a degree and it was largely cut without omitting any intended story beats. *FFIV* marks the shift from simple turn-based combat to the series' trademark Active Time Battle system, although its implementation is basic in comparison to subsequent titles. The job system was simplified once again to lock characters into a single role, but these roles were better defined thanks to the addition of class-specific abilities and commands. Mode-7 effects were employed for the first time to make airship travel and spell effects even more impressive.



FINAL FANTASY V 1992

SYSTEM: SNES

■ The job system flip-flop continues as fixed classes are done away with once again to make room for the most complex and intricate version of the system seen to date. That's largely why the game didn't get to leave Japan too, mind – it was seen as being far too hardcore for the Western market and at least three known attempts to localise it under different names all fell through. It's such a shame, since the awesome job system and refined ATB mechanics (progress bars were added to show who would be acting next) have since led to this being a series favourite for many the world over.

FFV WAS SEEN AS BEING TOO HARDCORE FOR THE WESTERN MARKET – THREE KNOWN ATTEMPTS TO LOCALISE IT FELL THROUGH

FINAL FANTASY MYSTIC QUEST 1993

SYSTEM: SNES

■ The first spin-offs came a few years previous on Game Boy, but this was the earliest one released on a home console. Almost the antithesis of *FFV*, it's a hybrid of *Zelda*-esque action RPG elements and a simple turn-based combat system where you never have control of more than two characters. In fact, you only actually have one by default – the game takes control of partner characters unless you switch to manual override. An entry-level JRPG and not a true *Final Fantasy* title, but still fairly entertaining.





FINAL FANTASY VI 1994

SYSTEM: SNES

■ Vastly improved visuals and a simpler character development system meant that this would not be denied a US visa as its forerunner so rudely was, but that only caused more confusion – *VI* was actually released in the US as *Final Fantasy III* to maintain numbering traditions. It's here that we first see a lot of the complexities that later become commonplace in the series, such as events where several parties must be formed and used separately, and choice as to the order in which certain scenarios play out. Widely regarded as the best game in the series, *FFVI* is unquestionably as good as 16-bit RPGs get so if you haven't played it, get on that – mechanically, it holds up brilliantly even by today's genre standards, the sprite-based visuals are timeless and Uematsu's score is simply god-tier.







FINAL FANTASY VII 1997

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

■ The leap from 16-bit to 32-bit hardware was one of the greatest the industry had ever seen and few franchises had a greater degree of ambition and potential to truly come of age here than *Final Fantasy* – sprawling epics like *V* and *VI* came in at under 4MB a pop, whereas *VII* would span three 700MB CDs. Characters made the jump from sprites to full 3D models, while backdrops were pre-rendered CG as was popular in games at the time to help them punch above their weight visually. The first *FF* to reach Europe is respected for other reasons, too; its setting, characters, themes, narrative and score are all benchmarks that modern RPGs have struggled to match for years and the ingenious Materia system offered all the depth of *FFV*'s job system and more for those who wanted it, while at the same time being simple enough on a base level to allow anyone to bluff their way through with enough old-school grinding. FMV sequences gave us a truly cinematic way to understand and engage with these characters, which is a huge part of what makes this the *FF* many swear by to this day.



FINAL FANTASY TACTICS 1997

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

Trading the traditional RPG action for another 16-bit staple, *Tactics* laid on 3D grid-based arenas in which to do battle in line with strategy RPGs such as *Tactics Ogre*, *Fire Emblem* and *Super Robot Wars* that had proven popular in Japan. In fact, a large chunk of the *Tactics Ogre* team actually worked on *FFT*, making it easy to see where similarities came from. Still, the in-depth job system and interesting twist on the main series' ATB mechanic lent this its own personality, leading to a number of indirect sequels. The game's world, Ivalice, would also go on to be the setting for *FFXII*.



FINAL FANTASY VIII 1999

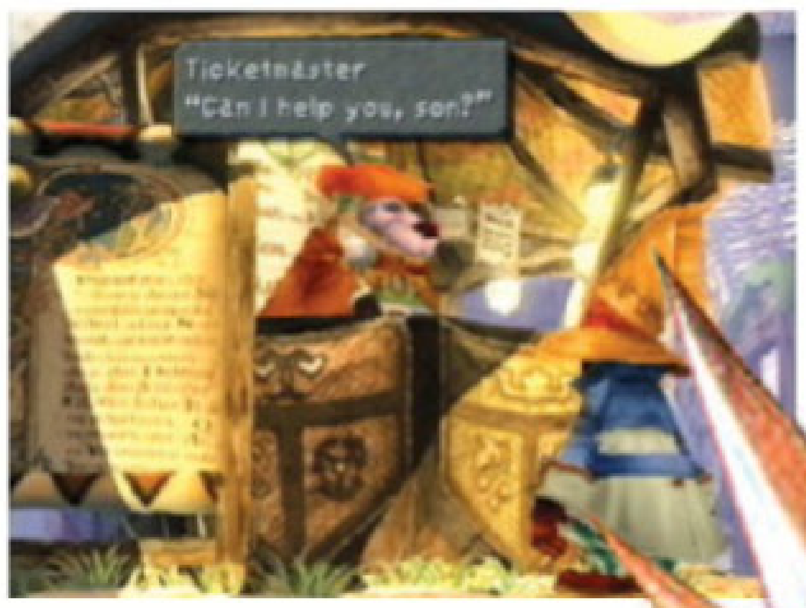
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

FFVII was the series' first step towards realistic visuals but *VIII* took that a step further. The result is a game that feels less stylised and as a result arguably doesn't hold up as well today, but it's still a popular pick in 'Best *FF*' polls. It's perhaps the first truly divisive game in the series, however – many couldn't get on with the unique Draw/Junction system for earning spells and upgrading characters, nor with the diversion from more traditional fantasy themes seen in older games. Whatever your take on the game itself, though, the Triple Triad card game still remains the best mini-game to ever have featured in the franchise. The infectious music (and impending threat of the Random rule spreading) still haunt us to this day.

FINAL FANTASY IX 2000

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

Sakaguchi's final entry as producer couldn't carry his unique style and approach any more proudly – it's little wonder he has been known to cite this as his favourite *FF*. A return to classic fantasy, this also saw the series go back to designated roles for each character rather than having a Materia or Junction-style system that opened up options for players. It's a little simpler as a result and while we'd suggest that this makes it the weakest of the PlayStation trio, there are plenty of fans who would like to Ultima us right in the face for suggesting such. So yeah, try it for yourself – the stylised looks help it hold up better today than *FFVIII* from a graphical standpoint, at least.









SAGA OF MANA

The unexpected success of the NES original in Japan and the sudden uptake of the Game Boy led Square to quickly turn its attention to the system and while the original plan was to create an RPG for the handheld (it didn't have any at the time), this would lead to the first handheld *Final Fantasy* game thanks to a name change for the Western market. *Makai Toushi Sa-Ga*, despite its localised name, would kickstart the *SaGa* RPG series, while *Final Fantasy Adventure* (*Mystic Quest* in Europe), arriving once again on Game Boy only a year later, planted the seeds for the Mana series. With only one overseas success in RPGs at the time, Square elected to slap *Final Fantasy* labels on *everything*. *Legend* got two sequels, again carrying the *FF* brand (*SaGa* as a franchise never really took off outside of Japan), while the more action-based combat of *Adventure* would find a new home on SNES via follow-up and all-time favourite *Secret Of Mana*.



FINAL FANTASY X 2001

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

Another generation leap brought with it huge potential for change and, once again, Square embraced the challenge. Results, it must be said, were somewhat mixed, though the game itself is strong enough to carry it regardless. Full 3D environments replaced the rendered backgrounds of old, while characters were far more detailed on the new console than ever before. Both FMV sequences and audio quality also saw improvements, although the switch to fully voiced dialogue was both too much for many that loved imagining classic RPG character voices as they would the faces of characters in books and also a weak link in general – one scene in particular is laughably bad (pun very much intended), but the general budget anime dub feel of the rest still jars somewhat with the otherwise stellar production values. Also, Blitzball. So much Blitzball…



FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE 2002

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Having seen the popularity of Western MMOs at the time, Square was keen to deliver its own alternative and had just the brand with which to do it. While having a main series title deviate so radically from the solo JRPG template upon which its storied legacy was built, one of the main things fans came to love about the game was how much lore from and love for previous *FF* titles was evident. *XI* boasts many firsts – first 'proper' console MMO, first cross-play MMO, first Xbox 360 MMO and first online *Final Fantasy*, to name but a few – but the one Square will be most interested in wasn't announced until 2012, when it was revealed that *FFXI* is the most profitable game in the entire series. Yeah, a decade of recurring subscriptions and an addictive gameplay model will do that…

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES 2003

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE

Given that Nintendo's pint-sized console didn't have the online clout for an MMO or the storage capacity for a full-on epic RPG, Square had to get a little creative. This four-player spin-off relies on far more action-heavy combat than main series games had previously, while also offering some ingenious new features to make multiplayer the best way to play – by charging attacks or spells with the right timing, you could combine multiple attacks into a single far more powerful blow, making coordination among players crucial to success.





FINAL FANTASY X-2 2003

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

The game that started a dangerous trend for Square. We can't say that we particularly wanted a direct sequel to *FFX* but even if we had, we're not sure this strange playable *Charlie's Angels* anime would have been entirely what we were after. Odd though it may be, the Dress Sphere system (for switching jobs by changing outfits, naturally) works well enough and the monster training/battling mechanics, while hardly *Pokémon*, are also fit for purpose. It's just a shame *that* intro put so many people off what is actually a decent, if unremarkable, *Final Fantasy* spin-off.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE 2003

SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE

What a smart play this was. Spotting that the GBA was the first handheld powerful enough to run and display a modern SRPG and that the *Tactics* formula was a perfect fit for handhelds, Square served up a near-endless strategic delight. Judges invoke Laws, which change the way each battle must be played, making it impossible to rely on the same handful of overpowered characters or abilities in all circumstances – it's all about thinking on the fly, which is precisely what you want from a tactics game.







FINAL FANTASY XII 2006

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

■ You can tell just from playing it that *XII* is a game created by a team with MMO experience – to all intents and purposes, this is a single-player MMO in much of its approach, design and combat. The Gambit system grows in strength as the game goes on, starting out as a way to have struggling characters quaff Potions in a pinch but ultimately developing into a system of such complexity that you can pretty much code your party to act independently and rarely even require your input. Many design decisions showcase a time where developers were trying their best to prevent trade-ins while retailers looked to upsell with guides and such – in one of the rudest RPG missables of all time, Vaan's ultimate weapon can only be obtained if you leave a handful of select chests around the world unopened, something that probably wouldn't have been discovered to this day if it weren't for the official strategy guide. Japan got a greatly enhanced version of the game in the form of the International Zodiac Job System version, which we'd love to see localised in HD form as the team has done recently with the updated versions of *X-2* and the *Kingdom Hearts* games.

DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII 2006

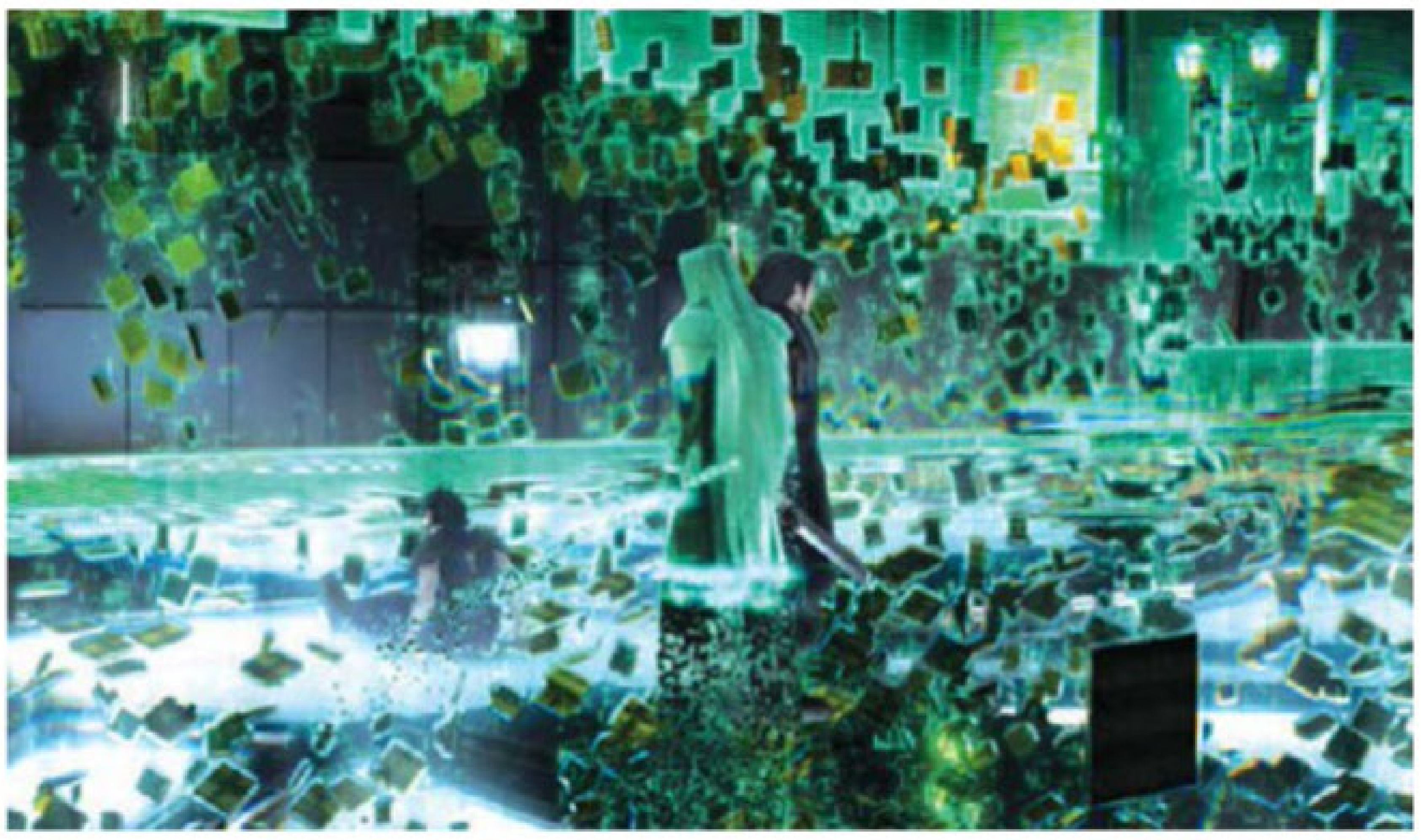
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

■ The less said about this the better, so we'll keep this brief. Missing the point of both newly appointed lead character Vincent Valentine and *VII* itself, this turgid shooter made it abundantly clear that the old adage is indeed true – you can't please all the people all the time. Series fans were let down by janky gameplay with only loose ties to *FF* canon while shooter fans were left raising their eyebrows at the wildly convoluted narrative and bizarre structure. Nobody had a nice time, basically.









CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII 2006

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

■ A far more fitting tribute to the *FFVII* legacy than *Dirge Of Cerberus*, this PSP action-RPG does a great job of fleshing out the back-story of the PSone classic. With Zack stepping into the starring role, you're able to experience first hand what it's like to actually be a SOLDIER badass, which proved to be enough of a hook to keep us playing. It certainly didn't hurt that it was one of the best-looking games on PSP, and strong sales reflected both that and its core quality.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS A2: GRIMOIRE OF THE RIFT 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

■ It worked well enough on GBA, so why not do it all over again on DS? While still solid, *A2* was faced with stiff competition on the immensely popular Nintendo handheld, the likes of *Disgaea*, *Front Mission* and *Advance Wars* already staking their claim on the system around the time the *FF* sequel rocked onto the scene. Iteration rather than innovation is core here – it's basically the same great strategy game, only with a few tweaks.





FINAL FANTASY XII: REVENANT WINGS 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

■ In a world where sequels to mainline *Final Fantasy* games were considered okay, a follow-up to hugely successful PS2 swansong *XII* was always on the cards. Few could have predicted the form it would take, though – this curious RTS neither looks nor feels like the game it supposedly follows on from, although summoning armies of Espers proved pretty neat even when taken in isolation.

ANOTHER GENERATION LEAP BROUGHT WITH IT HUGE POTENTIAL AND, ONCE AGAIN, SQUARE EMBRACED THE CHALLENGE



KWEH AS FOLK

It didn't take long after their introduction for chocobos to go from supporting characters to starring roles, with the global success of *Final Fantasy VII* kicking off a wave of bird-based spin-offs. The *Fushigi no Dungeon* series started off as a *Dragon Quest* spin-off, so it's somewhat fitting that Square should send its own RPG brand to copy Enix's once more. But *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon* was just the start – PlayStation owners had dungeoneering sequels, bizarre kart racers and even PocketStation mini-games before the chocobos went off to graze in new pastures like the WonderSwan, mobiles and later the DS and Wii. There have now been almost 20 *Chocobo* games spanning all number of genres – here's how it all played out for the unlikely critter heroes. Kweh!

- **CHOCOBO'S MYSTERIOUS DUNGEON**
  YEAR: 1997 **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON 2**
  YEAR: 1999 **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **CHOCOBO RACING**
  YEAR: 1999 **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **CHOCOBO COLLECTION**
  YEAR: 1999 **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **CHOCOBO ON THE JOB**
  YEAR: 2000 **SYSTEM:** WONDERSWAN
- **CHOCOBO ANYWHERE**
  YEAR: 2002 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO LAND: A GAME OF DICE**
  YEAR: 2002 **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY ADVANCE
- **CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 2: ESCAPE! GHOST SHIP**
  YEAR: 2003 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCO-MATE**
  YEAR: 2003 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 2.5: INFILTRATE! ANCIENT RUINS**
  YEAR: 2004 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 3: DEFEAT! THE GREAT RAINBOW-COLORED DEMON**
  YEAR: 2004 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO DE MOBILE**
  YEAR: 2006 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **FINAL FANTASY FABLES: CHOCOBO TALES**
  YEAR: 2006 **SYSTEM:** DS
- **FINAL FANTASY FABLES: CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON**
  YEAR: 2007 **SYSTEM:** WII
- **CID AND CHOCOBO'S MYSTERIOUS DUNGEON**
  YEAR: 2008 **SYSTEM:** DS
- **CHOCOBO AND THE MAGIC PICTURE BOOK**
  YEAR: 2008 **SYSTEM:** DS
- **CHOCOBO PANIC**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** IOS
- **CHOCOBO'S CRYSTAL TOWER**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO'S CHOCOTTO FARM**
  YEAR: 2012 **SYSTEM:** IOS

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: RING OF FATES 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

A handheld prequel to the GameCube title, *Ring Of Fates* shares much with the game it so clearly emulates. Played alone, it lacks a lot of the depth of the original but it won some respect back by extending the multiplayer component across oceans via Wi-Fi play. Sadly, with Nintendo shutting down online support for original DS games, you'll need to find a group of other owners to play locally to enjoy that side of the game today.





FINAL FANTASY IV: THE AFTER YEARS 2008

SYSTEM: VARIOUS



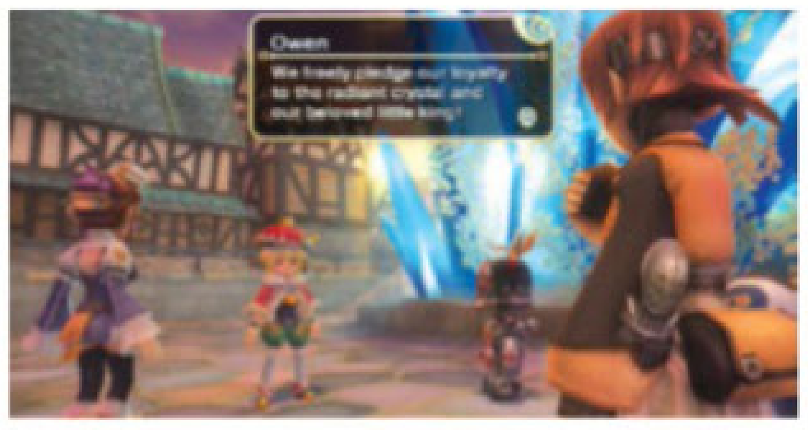
The sequels keep on coming, although it's clear that less effort went into this strange episodic effort than into many of the others. Assets are largely reused from the various remakes of the SNES game and despite a few interesting new mechanics (such as a lunar cycle that affects combat), it's still an extra chapter to a book many would be happy to simply leave closed or read fresh.

DISSIDIA FINAL FANTASY 2008

SYSTEM: PSP

What if all of the most famous characters in *Final Fantasy* history were to get together for some arbitrary reason and have a big fight? That's the question posed and, to a lesser degree, answered by *Dissidia*, a curious mix of arcade brawling and RPG mechanics. It looks great and plays well enough, but it's best seen as entertaining fan service – it's basically *Final Fantasy*'s answer to *Smash Bros.*, and you likely already know if you'd enjoy that or not.





FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: MY LIFE AS A KING 2008

SYSTEM: WII

A download-only title that does away with the idea of being a hero in favour of placing players on the throne and getting others to do the dirty work for them. It's slow-paced but it sort of works, if only as a way of seeing quests from a different point of view. Interestingly, it wasn't planned as an *FF* game at all – *Crystal Chronicles*' engine was apparently used to prototype the game and it eventually picked up the title as well.



FINAL FANTASY XIII 2009

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Or, 'The moment it became cool to hate *Final Fantasy*'. There's a lot wrong with *XIII*, make no mistake about it – the cast is among the weakest in core series history, the pacing is poor and complaints about its linearity are not misplaced. But where many other JRPGs attempt to disguise their linear structure, you have to sort of respect Square's decision to have *XIII* wear it on its sleeve. If anything, it makes the big third act reveal of the huge Gran Pulse area all the more impressive, plus the Paradigm battle system (a strange hybrid of custom job systems and fixed character roles, with line-ups that can be changed on the fly) is certainly more involved then many similar menu-driven efforts. We'd have a far easier job trying to defend it if it didn't end with a Leona Lewis song, though…

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: ECHOES OF TIME 2009





SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ It wasn't broken, and it didn't get fixed. *Echoes Of Time* offered more of the same for *Crystal Chronicles* fans, this time allowing cross-platform play locally between the Wii and DS versions. Still not really worth the effort for solo players to pour hours into, but multiplayer proved once again to be an amusing distraction and another great proof of the ways in which the *Final Fantasy* series could break into new realms of gameplay without losing its core values and charm.

FINAL FANTASY: THE 4 HEROES OF LIGHT 2009

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

■ While *XIII* showed a Square desperately trying new things to keep the JRPG afloat, this DS release instead saw the company fall back on what it knows so very well. As traditional a JRPG as you're likely to find in the 21st Century, this is perhaps most notable as the game that spawned the excellent *Bravely Default* as a non-branded follow-up.





FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: MY LIFE AS A DARKLORD 2009

SYSTEM: WII

■ If *My Life As A King* was a stretch for fans with its city management gameplay, this tower defence title is some full-on Plastic Man nonsense. A simple yet effective rock/paper/scissors system determines the effectiveness of each trap or monster on a given unit and the side-on viewpoint and vertical structure are welcome changes to the usual standards, but we're not sure to this day why this even has 'Final Fantasy' in its title.



FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: THE CRYSTAL BEARERS 2009

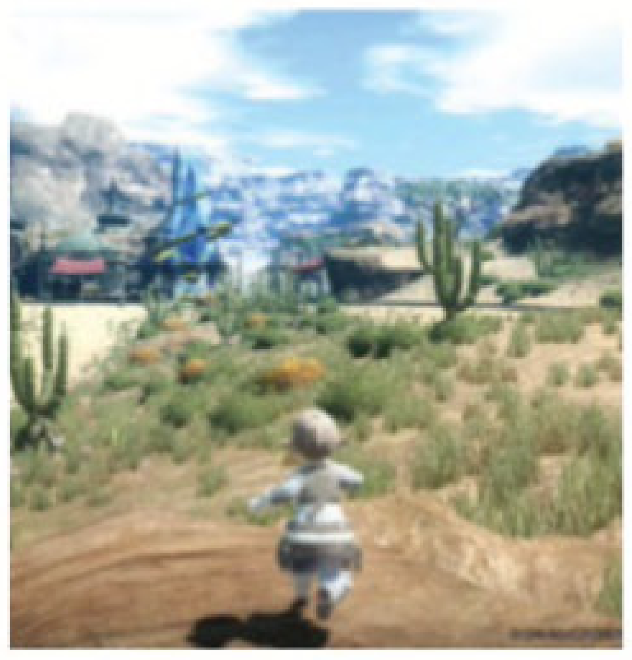
SYSTEM: WII

■ The nail in the *Crystal Chronicles* coffin, this multiplayer-only action title did away with not only the co-op gameplay that made its forerunners enjoyable but also with the levelling system and character progression you might expect from a decent RPG. If you thought *My Life As A Darklord* completely missed the point of the *Final Fantasy* series, you should check this title out. Only don't, because it isn't very good.



FINAL FANTASY XIV: ONLINE 2010

SYSTEM: PC



■ Another MMO was always on the cards after the insane success of *FFXI*, but the initial launch of *XIV* wasn't the second success story Square likely had in mind. No MMO ever has a particularly good launch but this was poor – console-style menu interfaces, patchy visuals and server issues led many to stick with *XI* instead. Square would need something drastic to fix this mess; its imminent updates did just that.



FINAL FANTASY XIII-2 2011

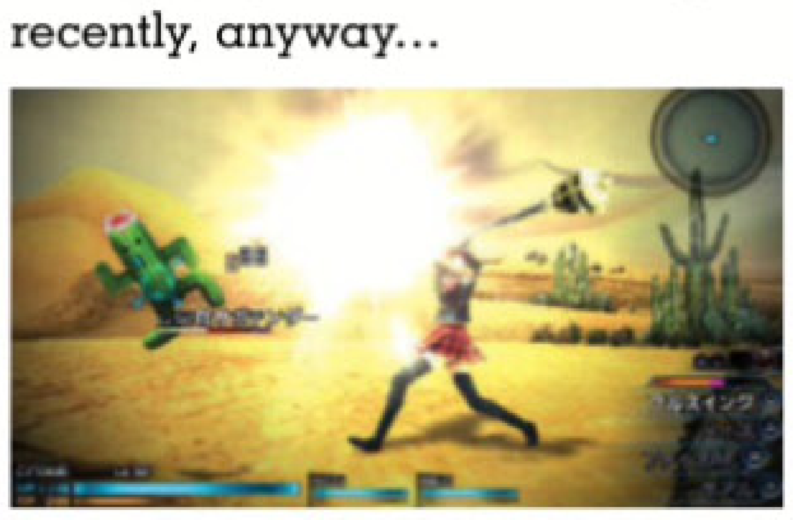
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Given the backlash to *FFXIII*, you have to wonder what Square was thinking in announcing a direct sequel to arguably the most hated game in the entire series. Still, *XIII-2* made almost too much progress from its linear progenitor – its entirely open-ended structure spanned both space and time to deliver the most confusing map screen and some of the most ludicrous time-hopping quests yet seen in the series. Monster recruiting and training, seeing the same locations in various time periods and the bizarre paradox endings rate among the highs, with characters once again disappointing.

FINAL FANTASY TYPE-0 2011

SYSTEM: PSP

■ *Monster Hunter* and its myriad clones cemented the PSP as the hardcore handheld of choice, so this action-leaning title proved to be right at home there. Despite being widely regarded as one of the best-looking PSP games and the best non-mainline *FF* titles in its native territory, the game would not be granted permission to leave Japan. Well, until very recently, anyway…





DISSIDIA 012 FINAL FANTASY 2011

SYSTEM: PSP

■ Both *Dissidia* and the PSP enjoyed wild success in Japan, so this oddly-named sequel (that second word is 'Duodecim', apparently) was to be expected. More playable characters, more stages and more content all presented fans with a reason to upgrade and if you're new to *Dissidia*, you can just jump in right here for the best experience.



THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY 2012

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

■ If you adore the music of the *Final Fantasy* series, then congratulations on having ears that work. Uematsu's compositions and indeed some of his understudies' works are among the most recognisable in all of gaming, making a rhythm action game that uses them an exceptional idea. Dividing tunes into Field, Battle and Event stages, each with different mechanics, *Theatrhythm* was a superb title that has since been rendered basically redundant by *Curtain Call*.

UEMATSU'S COMPOSITIONS AND INDEED SOME OF HIS UNDERSTUDIES' WORKS ARE AMONG THE MOST RECOGNISABLE IN ALL OF GAMING

FINAL FANTASY XIV: A REALM REBORN 2013

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

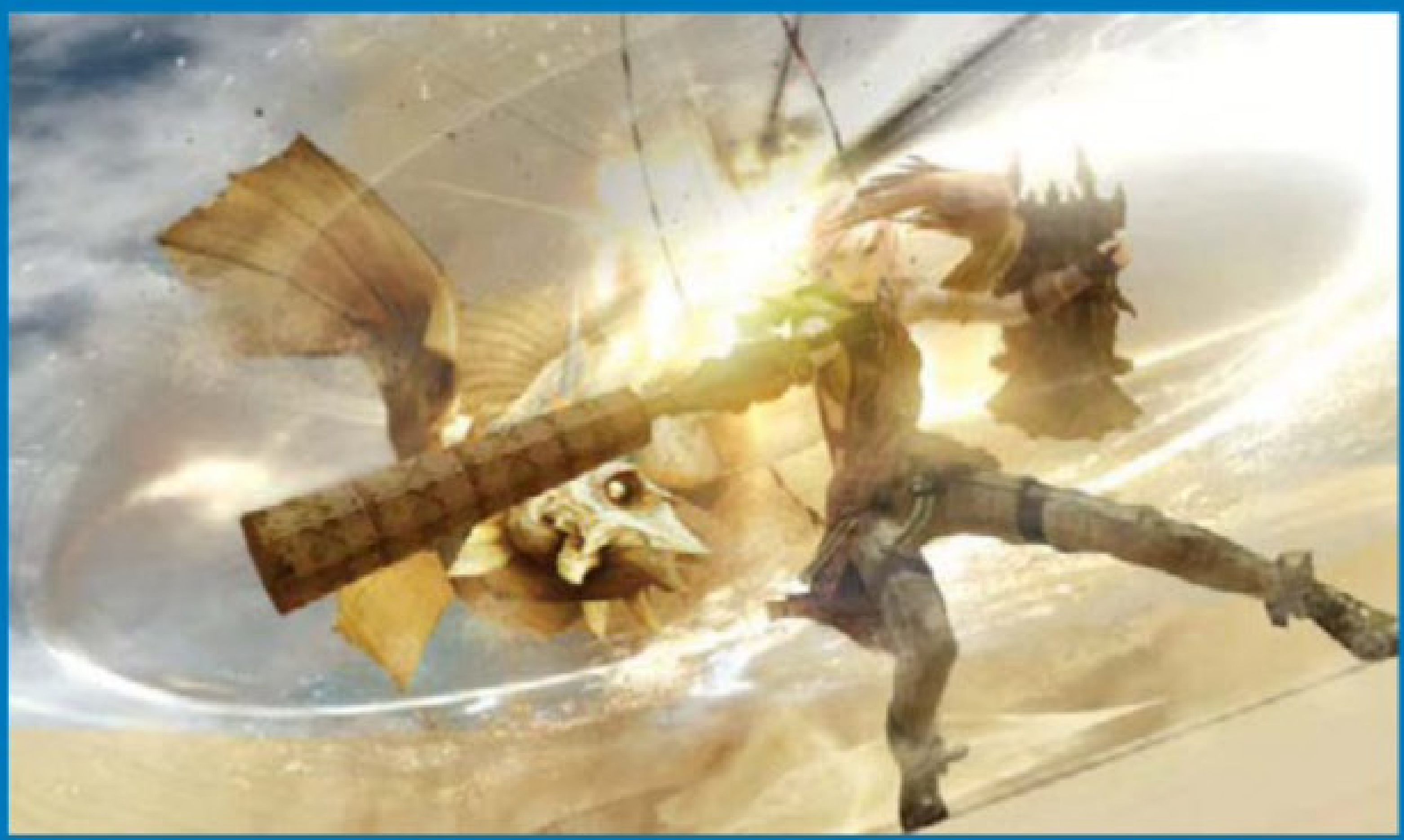
■ Developers, take note – *this* is how you fix a broken game. Changes across the board from GUI to basic gameplay made this reboot effectively a brand new game, and just in time for its PS3 launch too. Square would go on to refine it further still in time for a PS4 release that enjoys near parity with the PC version, with cross play supported across all three formats. With new content added almost every month, *A Realm Reborn* is destined to evolve yet more as the years roll on. We'd be surprised if this doesn't outgross *XI* in the next couple of years…



LIGHTNING RETURNS: FINAL FANTASY XIII 2013

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

If you didn't want one sequel to *Final Fantasy XIII* then it seems unlikely that you'd have wanted *two*. An odd marriage of the Paradigm system from the core game and *X-2*'s Dress Sphere mechanic, this action-heavy twist on the usual combat made switching outfits at the right time the key to victory. With a goal of saving as many people as possible within a restrictive time limit, it's all about making the best possible use of your time and the combat is actually pretty damn tech – just watch some YouTube exhibition mode stuff and try to claim otherwise.





THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY: CURTAIN CALL 2014

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

Yet another update, but yet another welcome one. *Curtain Call* brings the total song count to over 200 (with yet more available as DLC, if that's still not enough), adds a host of new characters and refines the Chaos Note system of the original into the much tighter Quest Medley mode. Pretty much essential for fans.







FINAL FANTASY EXPLORERS 2014

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

Stop us if you've heard this one before… this is an action-RPG where four players can team up to slay monsters, earn loot, craft better gear and repeat that cycle until they have stumps for hands. Yes, it's a *Monster Hunter* clone, but we're not going to say no to a slice of *FF*-flavoured hunting. Out now in Japan, it's expected to arrive over here some time this year. Maybe. You never can tell with *MH* clones.





FINAL FANTASY TYPE-0 HD 2015

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

We've omitted most remakes and reissues on account of how little they changed, but this makes the cut purely due to its interesting circumstances. Despite no localisation of the PSP original (or indeed a Vita upgrade, as was rumoured for a time), a HD version of *Type-0* is coming to PS4 and Xbox One. Cynics may see it as a vessel for the *FFXV* demo and nothing more, but we welcome the chance to enjoy the unreleased game in English.

FINAL FANTASY XV TBC 2015

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

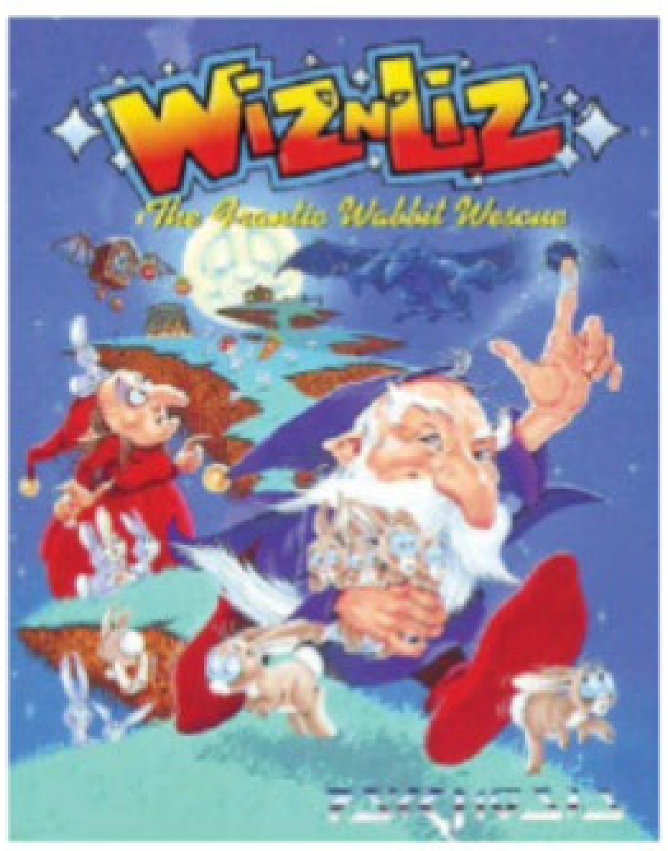
Originally announced as *Versus XIII* back in 2006, this incredible looking *FF* title only recently got bumped up to main series standing. It looks deserving of such a promotion, to be fair – redone for current gen consoles (it was initially planned for PS3), it's one of the best showcases we've seen so far for the new hardware. The car, the questionable English dub, and the dudebro vacation theme are all doing their bit to quash excitement, but it wouldn't be a forthcoming *Final Fantasy* game these days if people weren't hating on it. We can't wait.



BEHIND THE SCENES

WIZ 'N' LIZ

The Sega Mega Drive had its fair share of platformers, but there were none quite like Wiz 'N' Liz. Developed by Raising Hell Software (soon to become Bizarre Creations) and published by Liverpool's Psygnosis, this is the manic and rather exciting story of two wabbit-obsessed magicians…



Released: 1993
Format: Sega Mega Drive, Commodore Amiga
Publisher: Psygnosis
Developer: Raising Hell Software
Key Staff: Martyn Chudley (design, programming), Mike Waterworth (design, art direction), Matt Furniss (music and sound design), John White and Richard Browne (producers), Sarah Dixon (wacky words and moral support), Phil Snape (tester)



Wiz 'N' Liz's lead designer and coder, Martyn Chudley.

"I GREW UP down in Newton Abbey, Devon, in the late Seventies and early Eighties, the years when home computing was really starting, so I've always been very interested in computers," says Martyn Chudley, founder of Raising Hell Software. Having scraped together funds via a paper round, Chudley cut his programming teeth on a hard-earned Commodore 64 computer. After meeting fellow student Dominic Frazer, the two eschewed university and began a company called Powerslave Developments, creating the C64 game *Combat Crazy* for Silverbird, the budget arm of publisher Telecomsoft. It wasn't a success, yet despite this failure, Frazer and Chudley persevered and decided to make the leap into the 16-bit market, purchasing an Amiga 500 and Atari 520ST. "We made a couple of demos, and mine was called *Robodragon*," recalls Chudley, "and we sent them off to a few companies, including Psygnosis." Despite numerous rejections, the Liverpool publisher requested a meeting. "However, completely coincidentally, the day Psygnosis called us was the very day that Dominic told me he was giving up Powerslave and getting a 'real' job so he could make ends meet for his family," remembers Chudley. As a result, *Robodragon* and its creator made the long trip from Devon to Liverpool alone and once there he met the founders of Psygnosis, including John White and Ian Hetherington. "Basically they liked my demo and decided that they'd like to take it on for me to develop as a full game. Psygnosis! Wanted me!" laughs Chudley. "Although I didn't find out until a few years later that one of the reasons they liked me was because I was cheap and just fitted into the end of their development budget…"

Chudley spent the next year working out of his parents' house, slowly turning *Robodragon* into *The Killing Game Show* for the Amiga. With the process proving too lengthy, he moved temporarily to Liverpool to finish the game. "That was the plan, but in fact I never did go home and subsequently rented and bought my first house in Liverpool." *The Killing Game Show* was finally completed and released in 1990, at which point Chudley changed the name of his company to Raising Hell, mainly to reflect his recent sole ownership. Having coded an Atari ST version of the game, the Sega Mega Drive console was released in Europe and selected for another port. "This was a little more complex than anticipated," winces Chudley, "especially squeezing the game onto a 256k cartridge, along with the complete intro movie." But a year later, *Fatal Rewind* (as it was retitled) was released by Electronic Arts, and the young designer and coder had his first brush with what would become a very successful games console; a success which would naturally bring demand for further games. Having experienced the adrenaline rush created by the first *Sonic The Hedgehog* title, Chudley decided he needed to make his own high-speed scrolling game for two players. "I wanted something that was simple to control and super-fast." he says, and so *Wiz 'N' Liz* was born, or rather *Wizzy And Lizzy Save The Fluffy*



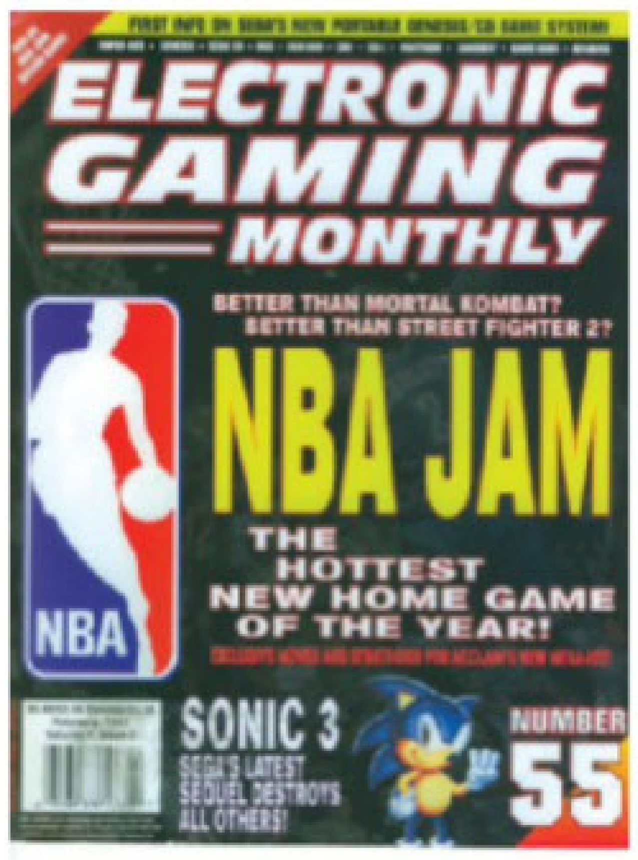
That wascally spell steals the wabbits!







WHAT THEY SAID…



Despite the odd title, Wiz 'N' Liz is a rather enjoyable running-type game with good graphics and a challenging tone! The levels are huge, but the game is a bit easy

Electronic Gaming Monthly, 1994

Wuffy Bunny Wabbits, as the game was known during development.

"I'm pretty sure the idea was my own, but back then we did a lot of casual chatting about games so it could have been a composite of loads of thoughts," continues Chudley. Mike Waterworth, who worked as an artist at Psygnosis and was assigned to work on the game, remembers it differently. "It was all Martyn's idea. As always, he had a strong idea of what he didn't want to make, which was a good starting point." Chudley was keen to avoid the violence which pervaded many games. "I remember at the very start doing a quick sketch of the Wiz and Liz characters, scribbled on stolen Psygnosis headed paper," recalls Waterworth, "and it pictures Liz about to hit Wiz with a wooden hammer. I was just trying to show some sort of comedic rivalry, but Martyn said it was too violent."

What did pass Chudley's non-violence test was as follows. Set on the magical planet of Pum, where the eponymous characters reside, a rogue spell has taken their beloved wabbits and dispatched them all around the globe. It's up to Wiz and Liz to travel the world and return the creatures back to their home. The action is viewed side-on with every level wrapping around and having its own distinguishing features such as Snow Land, Grass Land, Lunar Land and the charming Dead Land. Within each land are a number of wabbits who must be touched by Wiz or Liz to return them home. Doing so reveals either a letter or a bonus; collecting letters helps form a word, the completion of which reveals the escape door. However, the door remains barred until the player collects all the wabbits. Unusually *Wiz 'N' Liz* features no enemies (other than the end-of-level bosses) – each level is played against a strict time limit with the game definitely living up to its frantic reputation. Furthermore, to give *Wiz 'N' Liz* more substance, there is a spell system where collecting and combining fruit has beneficial effects including extra points, time and some rather cool mini-games that include wabbit-fied versions of *Pong*, *Space Invaders* and *Breakout*. "Mixing each of the combinations of fruit gave the player a different reward," explains Chudley, "and as we had 14 types of fruit it meant we needed over 100 interesting things to give the player. The mini-games were obviously the icing on the cake as we didn't want too many bonuses such as 'one extra star' and so on." Mike Waterworth recalls the friendly rivalry between Chudley and Jon Burton from Traveller's Tales which was developing *Puggsy* at the same time. "I think the variety of the mini-games developed in the game because of Martyn's mind needing new stuff to play with. It was commonly known about the rivalry with Jon Burton, hence the Splat Those Dudes mini-game and my RIP Puggsy background art on the graveyard level." In Splat Those Dudes, the player threw tomatoes at two characters who looked mightily similar to *Puggsy*'s Jon Burton and Andy Ingram. Also in the mini-game is Puggsy himself, while the favour was returned as Wiz and Liz appeared on gravestones in the alien's game.

THE ART WAS COMPLETELY DRIVEN BY MIKE AND HE JUST KEPT CREATING COOL STUFF WITH A GREAT STYLE

The game was ported to the Amiga shortly afterwards.





A character design sketch by Mike Waterworth.

But back to *Wiz 'N' Liz*, and with Chudley on coding and designing duties and Waterworth creating the graphics, the missing piece of the development was filled by Matt Furniss. "In the early Nineties I was working for Krisalis in Rotherham," he says, "and in addition to creating the sound for all of its games, I would also write music for other developers and publishers – like Psygnosis." Having been one of the first British developers to create a Mega Drive audio development kit and driver, Krisalis had quickly gained a reputation in the UK as the go-to guys for audio on the console, and Furniss' pedigree did him no harm. "I'd already worked with Richard Browne [Psygnosis' producer for *Wiz 'N' Liz*] and written some high-profile music for other Sega titles such as *The Terminator* and *Alien*[3]." Once on board, Chudley sent Furniss early versions of the game which greatly assisted him in getting the feel of the music and sound effects. "I was given free rein. Obviously the fast pace of the game required equally frantic music," he explains, "and as I hadn't done much Mega Drive music at that time, I was still experimenting with the types of sound I could make." In addition to the jaunty tunes, Furniss created all of the sound effects, most of which are musical in tone, created specifically to enhance the game's base melodies.

Wiz 'N' Liz was co-designed by Chudley and Waterworth. With them seemingly on a similar wavelength, were there ever any issues between the two? "The art was completely driven by Mike," says Chudley, "and he just kept creating this cool stuff with a great style. But to his annoyance, I kept rejecting the bits I felt were not suitable!" Yet both were clearly relishing the influence of the famous Sega mascot. Says Waterworth, "For me *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a big influence. I was blown away by that game, it was so fast and exciting. I remember being so impressed that when Sonic spins, one frame is just a ball with a drawn highlight." But it wasn't just the blue hedgehog that played a part in the design of *Wiz 'N' Liz* as Chudley remembers. "For the gameplay, *Sonic* was definitely there for the speed and cartoon style. As for everything else, it just came about in a sort of osmosis. Mike would draw something, for example an animation of a dog, which became the wabbits, and we'd take it from there. I liked Sega's arcade game *Flicky* as well, so there's a bit of that in there." Chudley's other key tenet was

THE WIZ 'N' LIZ WASCALLY FACT FILE



Did you know?

- Early on, the game was originally entitled ***Wizzy And Lizzy Save The Fluffy Wuffy Bunny Wabbits*.**

- **The character at the Sega start-up screen is from Chudley's *The Killing Game Show*.**

- **Sega were not keen on the name Raising Hell Studios, hence why the final game features the by-line of Waterworth and Chudley's names at the start screen instead.**

- **The pumpkin from the game (which would go on to become Bizarre Creations' mascot) was a nod to one of Chudley's favourite bands, Helloween.**

- **All the magic words are real. "They were shamelessly taken from the board game *Balderdash*," recalls Chudley. "One of my favourites is 'zneezy', which apparently means cold and frosty."**

- **Some of the password cheats are abbreviations. MRCF RSCD gives the player 500 stars and stands for 'Martyn R. Chudley For Sarah C. Dixon' while TCDT GBBS, a boss select cheat, stands for 'Totally Cool Dude, This Gives Big Baddy Select'.**

- **The end game credits were written in the style of *Blackadder The Third*.**

- **The floating asteroid on a rope was inspired by an image of *The Little Prince* on Asteroid B-612, in a novella by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.**

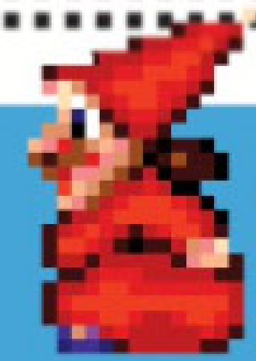
- **Many of the silly names were created by Sarah Dixon's brother, Richard. "Who has always been a touch wacky!" laughs Waterworth.**

- **According to Chudley, there was a working prototype of the game for the SNES but it was never released, possibly due to close links between Psygnosis and Sony at the time.**

- **After forming Bizarre Creations, Chudley also produced a quick port of *Wiz 'N' Liz* to the Sony PlayStation. But as he admits, by then "PlayStation games had just moved on..."**

- **As well as *Puggsy*, there is a cameo from another Psygnosis property, those terminally-depressed rodents that we know and love, the Lemmings.**





GAMES WORLD

A special version and how to fart

■ WIZ 'N' LIZ had the honour of featuring on Sky One's videogaming Nineties show *Games World* on several occasions. "I made a special version of the game where the user, in this case the TV station, could define the words to collect," explains Chudley. "I think we got quite a bit of exposure because of that – not many developers would go out of their way to create bespoke versions of their games." The show would select the letters and words on a theme; for example, in an episode transmitted on 14 February, the players had to collect letters to form the word VALENTINE. But this wasn't the only time *Wiz 'N' Liz* featured on *Games World*. Diane Youdale, probably known to most as Jet from the TV show *Gladiators*, starred in a regular slot on the show entitled The Peep Parlour, in which she would give out hints to certain games while posing as a character named The Games Mistress. "However for *Wiz 'N' Liz*," says Chudley, "she just commented on a so-called cheat in the game where if you pressed down the A button then the characters farted!"



WHAT THEY SAID...



Everything about [Wiz 'N' Liz] screams sharp, cute and well-presented, right down to all the nice touches like the numerous sub-games and spell effects. It certainly runs at an impressive pace

The One Amiga, 1993

to make the game tense; in the absence of any regular enemies, the time limit needed to be finely balanced. "The speed and randomness were there to get the player running around and having fun," he says. "But a little further into the game the time limit becomes very tight. I really wanted the player to experience these little bursts of panic when they realised time was running out. When the last wabbit was saved or the extra time bonus found, the pressure immediately dropped, only to then slowly build up again to another peak later on. You needed to prioritise the need to collect everything with the need to collect a specific item, and allow everything else to literally drift away."

Literally is right. All the items in *Wiz 'N' Liz* have wings and aren't afraid to use them, another device that heightened the need for speed. For Waterworth, Chudley had created a system where data from backgrounds could be imported into the game very fast. This greatly assisted his freedom to experiment and resulted in some of its crazy backdrops. "It meant the levels could be created and tested very quickly before my final graphics were drawn," recalls Waterworth, "so I roughly knew the sizes I could draw stuff in each level and had near complete freedom to create what I wanted." This creative freedom resulted in some memorable backdrops in *Wiz 'N' Liz* as Waterworth recollects. "I got to draw a shark, a submarine, a crashed car, a yeti frozen in a block of ice, an ice cream van, the Statue Of Liberty, the TARDIS, the Grim Reaper, whatever. It was the best job ever!" Chudley smiles as he recalls this process. "Mike understood exactly how the game and grabbing process worked and he would supply me with a completely drawn out level, which I would then compress and apply the collision detection. That's why there are so many fabulous objects in the backgrounds – Mike has a great imagination and within the *Wiz 'N' Liz* world, anything went!"



Another one of Wiz 'N' Liz's crazy bosses.

THE GAME WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE A BIT MARMITE

Wiz 'N' Liz employed a hub-style menu that had rarely been seen at this point. The player would alternate between the characters' home, a wraparound level containing doors to all the various lands and the eight distinct lands themselves. "I hadn't really thought about that," admits Chudley, "but given that we had the worlds and a fairly cool control method, it seemed natural to tie it together, with the same scrolling and jumping being used to select the levels and mix the fruit." The solution was fun, and fit into the game perfectly, and as the designer explains, was far superior to the alternative proposed. "A menu system was the other way, but it just seemed to break the flow and slow the feel of the game down." Other than the hub design, the lack of enemies was another novel feature of *Wiz 'N' Liz*. Did its creators ever feel under pressure to include something to shoot? "As far as I can remember, nope," says Chudley firmly. "The game was always going to be cartoony and passive as this was what we felt the Mega Drive audience wanted." With the mini-games providing a little scope outside of the normal gameplay, *Wiz 'N' Liz*'s nod to gaming convention is represented by its end-of-level bosses. "The plan was for the wabbits to be initially stolen from the Planet Pum, and the level bosses seemed like logical beings to be responsible for this," clarifies Chudley. "And secondly, it was a chance to show off technically. The Mega Drive was pretty powerful for the time, but the extra trick I used was to create the bosses from a playfield as well as sprites. This way it could be as big as the screen. And with the dragon [*Wiz 'N' Liz*'s

> GAMING EVOLUTION

Sonic The Hedgehog > Wiz 'N' Liz > Crash Bandicoot



Sega's famous blue mascot started out life here, in the brilliant, pacey and colourful *Sonic The HedgeHog.*



Influenced by Sega's game, *Wiz 'N' Liz* paid homage to its frantic speed, colour and wacky sense of humour.



final boss] we also exploited a trick where you could shear each column a little, which gave the impression of full-screen rotation." All clever stuff.

Wiz 'N' Liz took 17 months to create according to its end credits. Its cover was drawn not by Waterworth, but by fellow artist Dave Pether. "His version of the Liz character is by far cuter than my effort," admits Waterworth and the music and sound from Matt Furniss also impressed him. "I was surprised how it enhanced how the game felt to play – really lovely work." For Furniss, *Wiz 'N' Liz* proved to be a major stepping stone as he moved on to *Puggsy* and *Mickey Mania*, the latter of which opened a door for him to a career at Disney.

Critical reception to *Wiz 'N' Liz* was varied. "We had our share of 90%-plus scores," remembers Chudley, "as well as lower marks. The game was always going to be a bit marmite, given it was a bit non-conformist. Some people just got it, others didn't…"

Waterworth agrees. "I was very young and naïve back then and just thought that good games did well and bad games didn't. I knew we had a terrific game that was fun to play, but wasn't aware of the dark arts of advertising and marketing and how these affected a game's popularity. I'm not saying *Wiz 'N' Liz* wasn't marketed well, but I guess some reviewers just didn't get it." Despite this, both feel very proud of the manic platformer. "I was really pleased with how it came out," says Chudley. "*Wiz 'N' Liz* didn't have the presence of many of the big Mega Drive games of the day, but I could look at it and say it looked good, sounded good and played good – and was non-violent. I felt the balance of the game was spot-on and while it could be easily picked up and played, there was a pretty hardcore game under the surface, particularly on the later levels and at higher skill levels." says Mike Waterworth, "It's very different to other games and I love that. I had no original intentions apart from making a game that looked good and was enjoyable to make. I remember a review of the game saying that it looked like we had fun making it – I was very happy with that comment, because we truly did."

And finally, helping Chudley in particular through the vital final stages of development was Sarah Dixon. A Psygnosis employee, she and Chudley met while the latter was working on *The Killing Game Show*. "Sarah was key as the last few months of making the game were horrendously hard," recalls Chudley, "especially with me being the only coder with all that game content, modes, bugs, spells, bosses… and I think she kept me semi-sane and looked after everything for me that wasn't *Wiz 'N' Liz*!" Dixon and Chudley would go on to form Bizarre Creations and get married, so completing the circle for *Wiz 'N' Liz*. Peace and love, man, peace and love!









Once a wabbit was saved, a letter appeared which needed to be collected sharply before it flew out of reach.







RETRO

INTERVIEW

THE ARCADE KING

The designer of Robotron: 2084 and Defender is still creating arcade games three decades on. Discover why Eugene Jarvis loves making videogames

Although he studied to become a biochemist, the Californian-born Jarvis soon found himself working in Atari's pinball division. He moved to Williams when the branch was closed down and eventually started making videogames after being impressed by *Spacewar!* while studying in Berkeley. While his first game, *Defender* was a huge hit, 1982's *Robotron: 2084* is arguably his signature game, as it utilises a twin-stick set-up that's still widely used in shooters today. Jarvis himself is still in the arcade industry and currently heads the studio Raw Thrills, which specialises in various games, including licences for *Aliens* and *Batman*.

So you studied biochemistry?
It all relates back to the fairy tale about getting three wishes. Of course the best first wish is to have as many wishes as you want! So the idea of studying biochemistry was to find the biological key of immortality and then once that is solved there is time for all the other wishes. After studying biochemistry for a couple years, I realised that the mystery of biological life would take many lifetimes to solve, if ever, even with the current and foreseeable advancements of science. So the best course of action is to enjoy my current life for as long as I get! The frustration of decoding biology and biochemistry is that you are trying to unravel 3 billion years of evolution, trying to play God's game blindfolded – an incredibly slow process for a single human lifetime. So instead of playing God's game, with computers you can play your own game where you design the rules, you're the master of your own universe; you start your own Big Bang!

How was Atari's pinball division?
I started by finishing up the *Atarians*, their first pinball back in early 1977. They were wide body pins, like the new *Wizard Of Oz*, and they had the first digital sound synthesizers, I had a blast working with these early 4-bit synths – making crazy sounds never heard before!

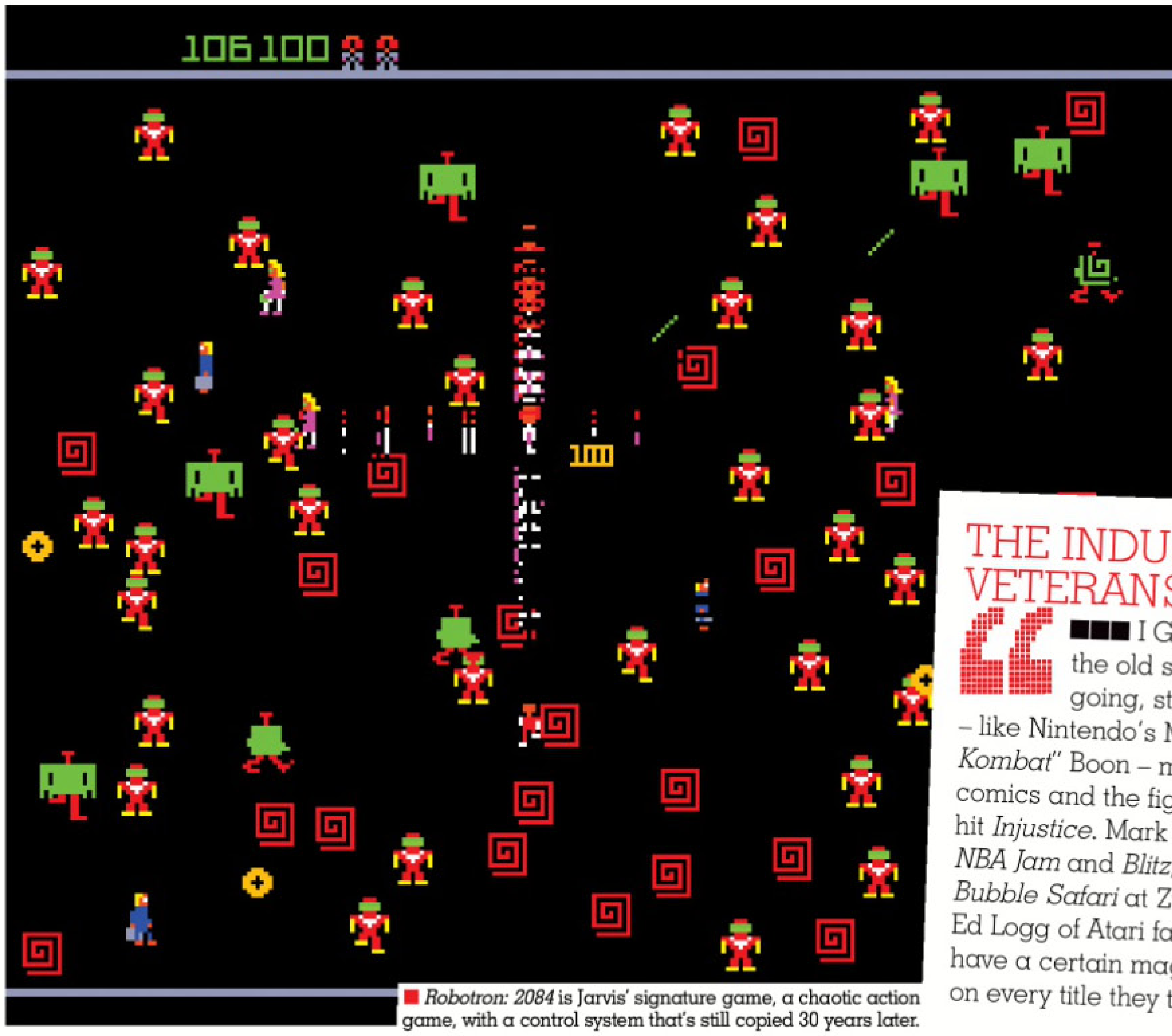
So what do you like about pinball?
I had been playing pinball since I was eight, and I used to sneak into Johnny's Smoke Shop and play in the back room where all the bookies hung out. Like chess, pinball is a skill game where the player has almost total control (on a good day) but the ever-present wildness of the ball makes every game different. It is chaos theory incarnate! Newtonian mechanics strung out through enough events becomes indistinguishable from quantum physics – chaos theory equals the uncertainty principle.

I HATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES AND MEETINGS, BULLSHIT ARTISTS, AND SELF-APPOINTED MARKETING EXPERTS



EUGENE ON CHESS

"WHAT I LOVED about chess is that it is a pure skill game. So it was a true battle of the minds with the goal to totally destroy and humiliate the opponent. It is not a fun game to lose! But the best part of chess is that to be a good player, you have to anticipate your opponent's next five moves, you have to get your head inside your opponents head, otherwise yours will be cut off! So you are forced to think from other guy's perspective – a great life lesson."



■ *Robotron: 2084* is Jarvis' signature game, a chaotic action game, with a control system that's still copied 30 years later.

THE INDUSTRY VETERANS HE ADMIRES

"■■■ I GUESS I especially admire the old school arcade guys still going, still on top of their game – like Nintendo's Miyamoto, Ed "*Mortal Kombat*" Boon – mixing it up with DC comics and the fighting game with his new hit *Injustice*. Mark Turmell the legend of *NBA Jam* and *Blitz*, jumping genres with *Bubble Safari* at Zynga, and the amazing Ed Logg of Atari fame. These guys have a certain magic that rubs off on every title they touch."

Do you think there's a symmetry behind pinball and shoot-'em-ups (in that they both require skill and discipline to perform well)?

Most of the great games of the classic era, post *Space Invaders*, were all based upon the basic pinball game mechanic. Three lives (balls) and play until all your lives are exhausted (balls have drained). You could earn an extra life (extra ball) by beating a certain score. This was in contrast to early games such as *Pong*, which were based on time or player versus player score competition. So videogames became very much an extension of pinball.

What did you learn from pinball greats Steve Kordek and Steve Ritchie?

I spent a huge part of my pinball-programming career working with Steve Ritchie. Steve was a California dreamer, a relative novice to games and pinball when he started, an outsider in the Chicago-dominated culture, and this gave him a fresh perspective and a new convert, true believer enthusiasm along with an amazing creative spirit.

Steve Kordek was the exact opposite of Ritchie; he was Mr. Pinball, the consummate old-school Chicago designer versed in the pinball vernacular. He knew what worked and what didn't, and had no problem telling you. So when the new Steve came to Chicago to work with the old Steve it was a combustible mix of the old and the new. And there were definitely fireworks and personnel combustion when the two met. I joined Ritchie's revolution as he pushed through his crazy ideas about multiball, multilevel, background sounds, display effects, ramp games, etc, etc. The two Steves both learned from each other, and the result was pure magic. Ritchie taught me the power of the big revolutionary idea, the killer concept that could obsolete everything that came before. Ritchie would constantly press his team for more. There could never be enough cool new stuff in a game. He went through programmers like a Marlboro chain smoker on a cigarette break.

Kordek's wisdom was a quieter sort. He was a master tweaker; there was no game, no matter how crappy, that couldn't be fixed. He was a student of drain lanes and ball time and layout tweaks, opening up shots that were impossible, adding a ramp here or there. Designing a game can be like building a boat – it has to be sexy, cool-looking, and have high performance to sell, but it is only as strong as its weakest link – you can get 98 per cent right, but if 2 per cent is a hole in the bottom, you're sunk.



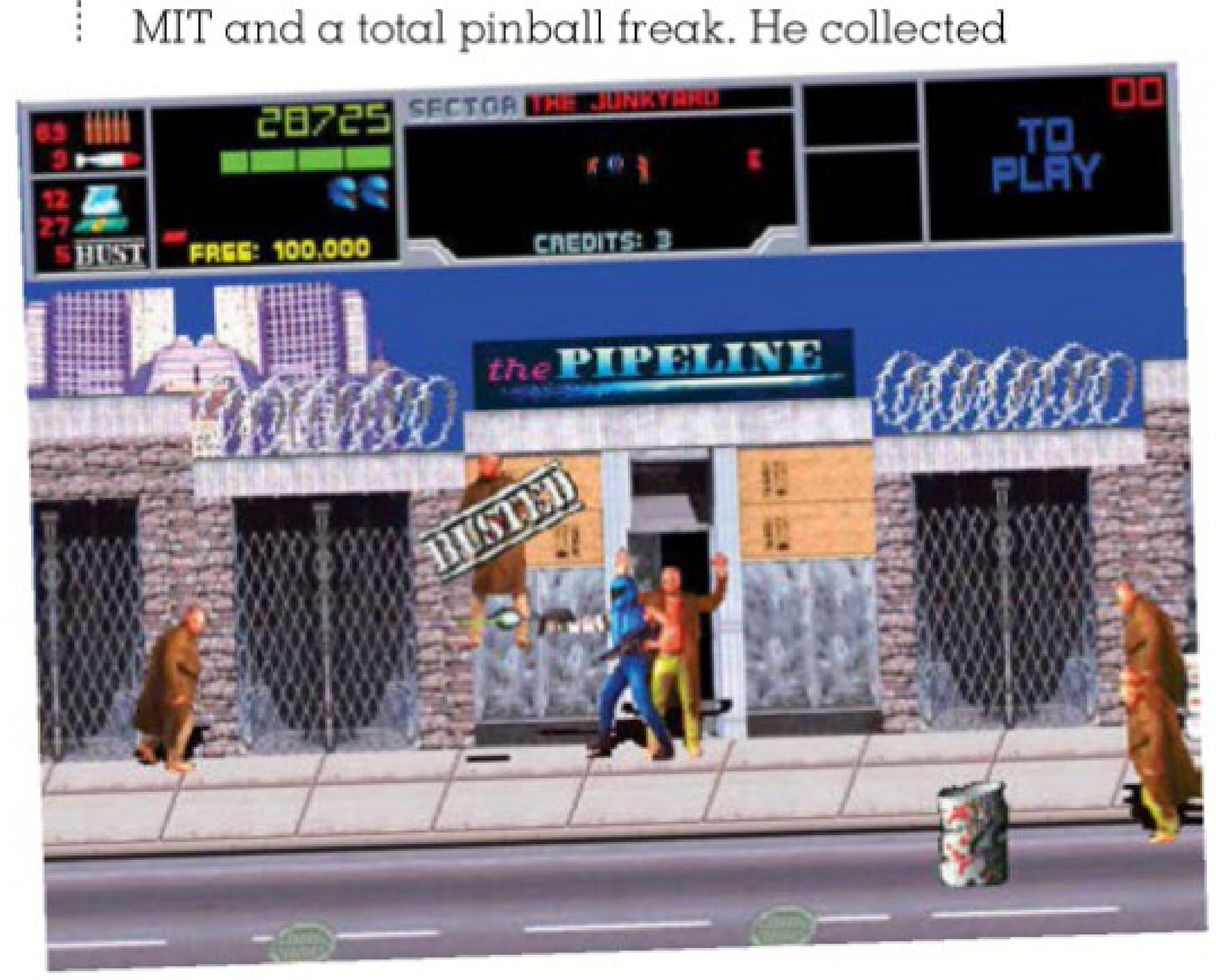
■ *Cruis'n USA* saw Jarvis move into the world of 3D. Originally released in arcades, it become an N64 exclusive.

Why did you eventually make the move into videogames?

The great thing about pinball design is that no matter how you screw up the design at the end of the day it is still a pinball game and there is an inherent fun and excitement batting around the steel ball. Conversely, no matter how great and brilliant the design is, it never can be anything different than pinball, with all the inherent limitations of the genre. With games you started with a blank screen. The game can be anything from the embarrassingly bad to the incredibly good, with an infinity of concepts, play mechanics, themes, stories, universes, etc. You can design anything that is designable – maybe some things that aren't. You are creating an entire universe of your own, free from the limitations of balls, flippers, and gravity. You can populate these worlds with your own brand of physics, morality, economic systems, artificial intelligences (although often degenerating into artificial stupidity).

How did you meet Larry DeMar?

Larry was one of the original hackers from MIT and a total pinball freak. He collected



pinballs, and played them incessantly. He sent a letter to Williams expressing his interest in pinball. After a few months his letter filtered down to Steve Ritchie and I, and we jumped at the opportunity to bring in Larry, and show him the *Firepower* proto. After playing *Firepower*, DeMar was totally hooked on pinball design. It was clear to us that DeMar was a brilliant coder and designer so we hired him on the spot. We probably set the Internet back 10 years by stealing DeMar from Bell Labs.

How does it feel knowing both *Defender* and *Robotron* are regarded as cornerstones of their genres?

In the Eighties there was so much virgin territory in the games landscape that it was the goal of every designer to create a new genre with every new game. It is almost laughable today with the emphasis on sequels and tweaking established genres, but in the Eighties if somebody had already done, say a football game, then you would pass on it, cause it was already done! In that era, games had a lifetime of a couple years at best, and everybody just moved on to the next new thing. After the videogame crash – we all thought the next new thing was something else and games had gone the way of the hula hoop and disco into fad heaven! So it is amazing to me that anyone plays these old pixel games today with all the amazingly brilliant new stuff out today. Although I have to admit there is some kind of magic in those old arcade cabinets. They tap into a kind of obsessive primal Neanderthal rage that is incredibly addictive.



Many of your arcade games were quite violent, is there any reason for that?

I am surprised about the ongoing debate about violence in videogames, like it is somehow a new phenomenon. Just like the good old-fashioned fairy tales with poison apples, and witches thrown in ovens; from day one, videogames have been about shooting, killing, and dying. The beloved classic *Pac-Man* features cannibalism! Super Mario, that cute Italian plumber is always smashing, crushing, and killing or getting killed with fireballs and burning lava; or committing suicide falling from great heights. The truth is any game with a finite number of moves or lives is about life and death and survival. Survival is the strongest human instinct. Those who had weak survival instincts are not here today. So the strongest human emotions concern survival and those games that exploit the survival instinct can be very compelling indeed.

IT IS AMAZING TO ME THAT ANYONE PLAYS THESE OLD PIXEL GAMES TODAY WITH ALL THE AMAZINGLY BRILLIANT NEW STUFF OUT



How did you find the 2D to 3D change?

Changing from 2D to 3D ranges from trivial to massive. 2D is all about the God's eye overhead view, with a static camera and complete information for the player. If you maintain this camera and just move the graphics to 3-D or pseudo 3D, then it is mostly a cosmetic graphical change. This is basically what we did moving *Robotron* to *Smash TV*. But if you move to a first person immersive 3D, then everything changes. It becomes much harder to bring broad strategic elements to gameplay, due to limited info available to the player, and the game tends to become a tactical twitchfest, heavy with special effects and cool graphics in order to cover up an absence of depth. Kind of like your typical comic book hero action movie. When you are fighting in the trenches trying to survive a few more milliseconds it is hard to strategise about the implications of global warming on rap music memes.


Jarvis' studio Raw Thrills continues to make arcade games. This is *The Fast And The Furious Drift*.

Were you ever tempted to join a more traditional publisher like EA or Activision?

There were times back in the day when it was an option, but anytime you sell your soul it is a deal with the devil. I hate management committees and meetings, bullshit artists, and self-appointed marketing experts who have never done anything. And unfortunately big firms are full of these guys. There are always a few geniuses who really know the score, but they are far outnumbered by egotistic power-hungry posers.

You're an arcade developer through and through. What attracts you to scene?

It is all about immediacy and human interface, and the arcade gives the designer the most flexibility to create a cool experience that's not limited to a 5-inch screen, or a standard set of controls.

Why did you set up Raw Thrills?

In early 2001, Midway arcade imploded, and I 'retired'. After a couple of weeks things got slow around the house, and my old design buddies kept bugging me to start a new company so we didn't have to all go and work 'normal' jobs. In a moment of insanity I gave in, and we started a new company. We initially were going to do gaming and console titles, but the lure of the arcade proved too strong – so here we are. I remember waking up in a cold sweat a couple weeks after starting the company and thinking – 'what the hell am I getting into?' But it was too late to back out, and we have been having a ball.

Why do you think your company continues to do well in a difficult market?

I think you have to have a passion for your niche. You can't fake it, you have to put the love in your game, and everyone notices. You have to believe, be all in (it's never a part time thing) and never look down!

GAME CHANGERS

MORTAL KOMBAT

Released: 8 October 1992 **Publisher:** Virgin (EU), Midway Games (US) **Developer:** Midway Games (Arcade), Acclaim Games (Consoles) **System:** Arcade, Amiga, Sega MegaDrive, SNES



Ed Boon and John Tobias' decapitated heads can be seen impaled on spikes at the bottom of The Pit stage —possibly the best developer cameo ever?

The original video(game) nasty, Mortal Kombat has had a much bigger impact on the games industry than is immediately evident - we examine how a game built in under a year shaped gaming forever

THERE ARE FEW games franchises as notably controversial as *Mortal Kombat* – it was one of the first videogames to divide gamers and the mainstream press, its bloody depiction of one-on-one violence a step too far for some of the more conservative commentators when it was released in late 1992. Arriving first on arcade machines, the game that would go on to spawn nine proper sequels and a slew of licensed spin offs (and some *terrible* movies…) almost wasn't made at all.

In 1991, Midway tasked developers Ed Boon and John Tobias with creating a fighting game that could be put together and ready for release within a year – presumably to cash in on the hype that Capcom's *Street Fighter II* had initiated a year earlier. Ten months later, the game was ready – an initial development team of four people taking on the bulk of development. Impressive considering the whole game is crammed into 8mb of data, with a 64-colour palette and 300 animations per each of the seven characters.

On top of that, *Mortal Kombat* also introduced its unique five-button control scheme that has since become a standard in the series. A series of incredibly basic light attacks are complimented by launchers, low moves and supers – all of which use simple left, right, up or down inputs, unlike *Street Fighter*'s quarter- and half-circles. This, along with the relatively shallow move pools, made it far easier for casuals to pick up than its genre rival: another reason the game quickly gained mass popularity.

After seeing success in the arcades, *Mortal Kombat*'s name began to circulate around gaming circles and, inevitably, the media – it matched even its inspirational peer, *Street Fighter II*, in terms of popularity, by 1993. Of course, the ultra-violence and over-the-top executions garnered the most attention; with international press claiming the game glorifies murder and violence. It's comic book violence, sure – something the action movies of the time easily

THE ANATOMY OF MORTAL KOMBAT

MORTAL KOMBAT HAS GONE ON TO INSPIRE A GREAT GLUT OF GAMES, BUT WHAT LEAD TO ITS CREATION IN THE FIRST PLACE?



STREET FIGHTER II

★ *Street Fighter II*, Capcom's seminal fighting game, directly caused *Mortal Kombat*'s creation. When Midway's rival launched, Capcom went as far as advertising *Street Fighter* as the superior fighting title in an attempt to stem *Mortal Kombat*'s very impressive sales rush.



JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

★ In the very early stages of the game's development, the studio had named Liu Kang 'Minamoto no Yoshitsune' – a name later dropped by Boon because he "just couldn't deal with the name". Goro, too, came from a Japanese myth – based on Rokurokubi: demons with stretchy heads.

MIDWAY'S SCHEDULE

★ The reason that *Mortal Kombat* had such a short time in development (only ten months) was because Midway only ever intended it to be a stop-gap in its other arcade plans... this then allowed Ed Boon and John Tobias free reign on the project, and, as they say, the rest is history!

outclassed – but being able to enact it *yourself* didn't sit too well with a lot of people, especially the parents of children who would wander into arcades and play the game without any kind of supervision.

The press backlash against the game's trademark 'Fatality' finishers was in full swing by the time the game was ready to move into the home console market. For publishers, this was a tantalising opportunity: all news is good news, and during the Nintendo Vs. Sega console wars of the early Nineties, Sega executives were licking their lips at the opportunity to get one over on their Nintendo rivals. Sensing the hunger for the blood and violence *Mortal Kombat* offered in the now-maturing games community, Sega cannily released the home version on the MegaDrive with the 'Arcade Edition' dub: something Nintendo's tame, bloodless, murder-less version didn't on the SNES.

The result? Sega saw their market share climb to 55% in 1993, the first time Sega had ever pulled ahead of Nintendo in the console war, with thanks to some particularly aggressive advertising on Sega's

MORTAL KOMBAT'S BLOODY DEPICTION OF ONE-ON-ONE VIOLENCE WAS TOO MUCH FOR SOME COMMENTATORS

KEY FACTS

- *Mortal Kombat* mainstay Jonny Cage was supposed to be a virtual version of Jean-Claude Van Damme (hence the 'JC' initials) but the actor dropped out during negotiations… leaving a parody in his place
- The game went through the names *Kumite, Dragon Attack, Death Blow* and *Fatality!* before the developers finally settled on *Mortal Kombat* after someone mysteriously wrote a K over the C on a drawing board
- *Mortal Kombat* veteran Raiden was based on the character Lightning in *Big Trouble In Little China*

part ("Genesis does what Nintendon't" was a genuine slogan used at the time). Sega had tapped into that anarchic, 'screw the man' rebellious nature of the Nineties with much aplomb.

■■■ Transient profits are all well and good, but the decision to release the game uncensored would return to haunt Sega and Acclaim when their game was taken to the Supreme Court under accusation of being 'a menace to America's children'. Sega executives believed the case was pushed to court by Nintendo, though no solid proof of this claim exists.

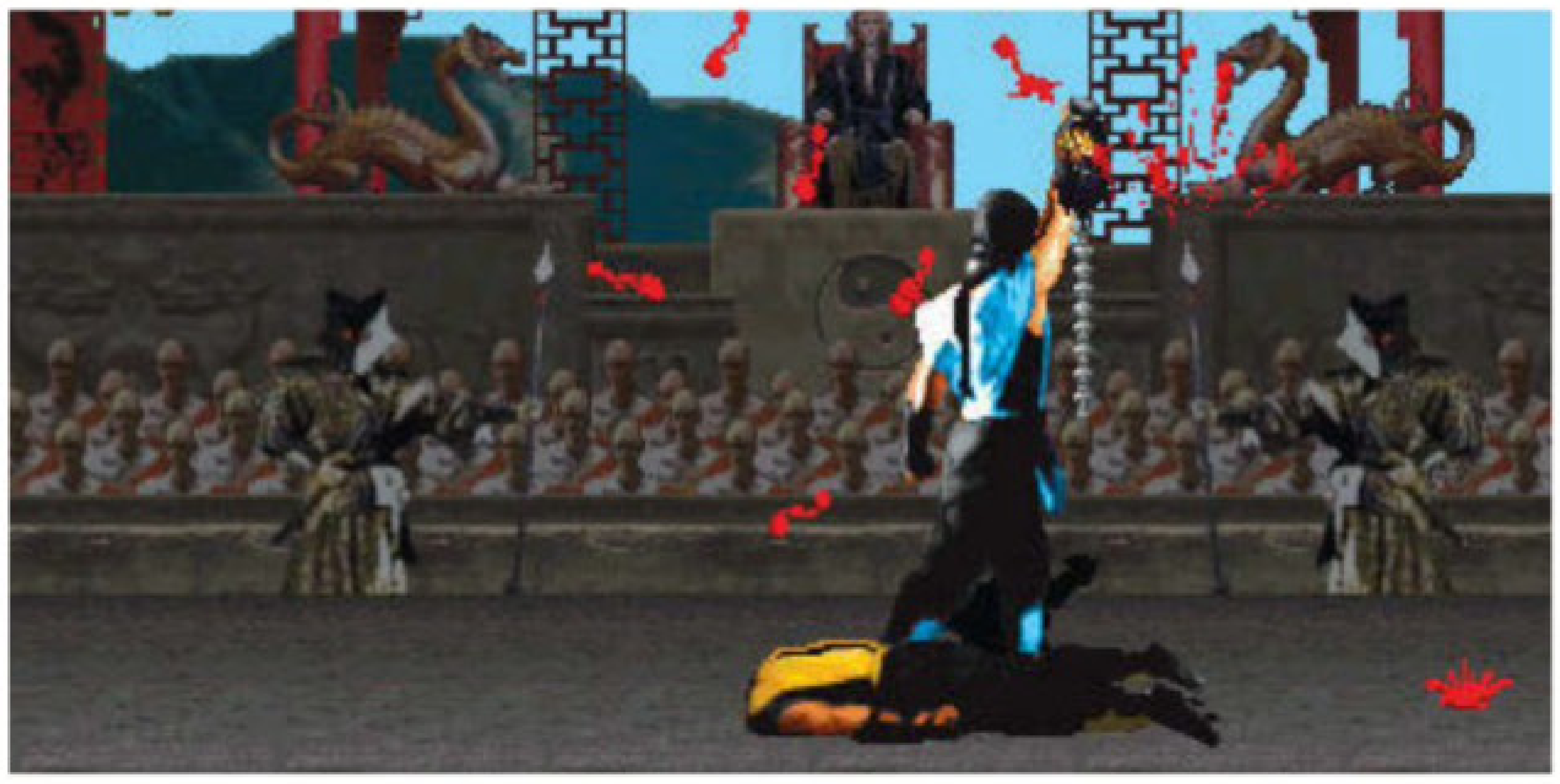
Without *Mortal Kombat* bringing the 'problem' with violent videogames to the attention of the general public, we wouldn't have the Entertainment Software Association (a body that started out as the Independent Digital Software Association). From lobbying in Washington to fighting censorship, the ESA vowed to self-regulate, setting up the ERSB ratings system – which influenced our European PEGI (Pan European Game Information) – and even lead to the creation of E3.

Since then, aside from a little in-fighting between hardware manufacturers, the games industry has been largely united in its drive to present games as equal to other media. Without *Mortal Kombat* setting a very graphic precedent in what games *could* get away with, it's likely the industry might have travelled a safer path, making smaller ripples before ever hitting a level where the American senate had to take them seriously as a form of entertainment. It's quite ironic for a game built in ten months, really, but without *Mortal Kombat*, this industry would be nowhere near as developed as it is today.

GAME CHANGERS

MORTAL KOMBAT'S BLOODIEST MOMENTS

THE ORIGINAL MORTAL KOMBAT IS THE REASON OUR INDUSTRY IS BOUND BY A SELF-IMPOSED RATINGS SYSTEM… BUT THAT GAME'S VIOLENCE AND GORE WAS JUST THE BEGINNING. DON'T SCAN THIS PAGE IF YOU DON'T WANT ANY HIGH-OCTANE NIGHTMARE FUEL…



SUB-ZERO'S SPINE RIP FATALITY

THIS FATALITY WAS actually referenced explicitly in the court case brought against Midway and Sega in 1993. It even inspired Senator Lieberman (opposing Sega) to quote "I was startled […] And at the end, if you really did well, you'd get to decide whether to decapitate...how to kill the other guy, how to pull his head off. There was all sorts of blood flying around."



FALLING INTO THE PIT

THE SECOND ITERATION of The Pit (it was the keystone stage of the first game) was much more imposing and terrifying than the first. It was the first time the *Mortal Kombat* series deviated from its side-on view, instead opting for an overhead view as your opponent plummeted to the ground, before that spine-shattering *crunch* audio effect… which we can still hear today.



KUNG LAO'S HAT SPLIT

WHEN DEVELOPING THE second *Mortal Kombat*, the developers wanted to include everything they planned for the first game, but didn't have time due to scheduling. As a result, new characters, fatalities and stages were introduced. The best one (and one of creator Ed Boon's favourites) was Kung Loa splitting an opponent in half with his weirdly sharp hat.



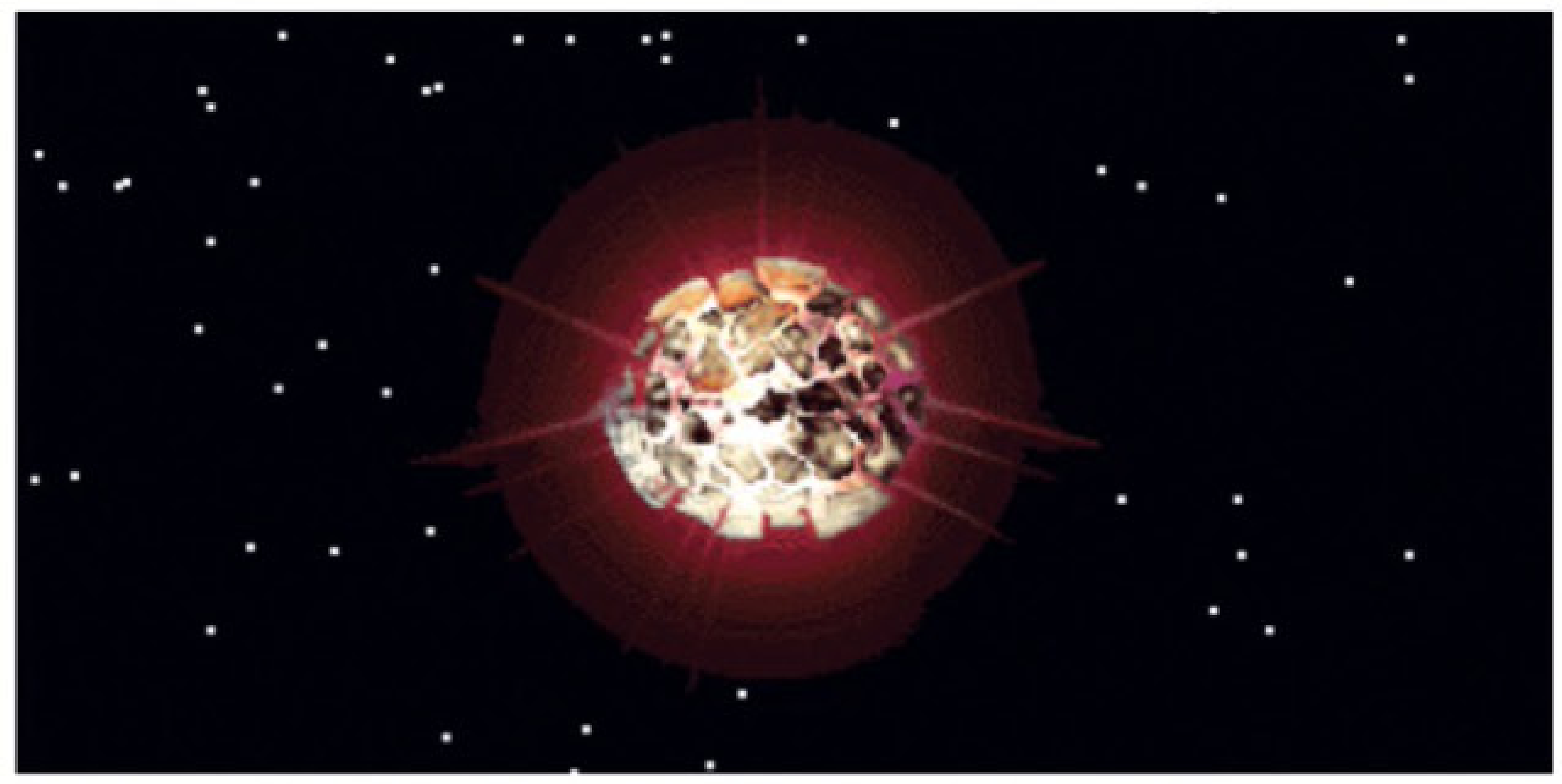
REPTILE'S ACID SPEW

AFTER HIS WEIRD cameo in the first game, Reptile graduated to legitimate playable character by the time *Mortal Kombat II* hit the shelves. His fatality involved spewing acid onto the opponent, melting them to the bones. Because of this, the game was banned in Germany and censored in Japan, the first time a Western game was censored in the country.



KABAL'S TERRIFYING FACE

KABAL MADE HIS debut in *Mortal Kombat III*. He was supposedly horribly disfigured, leading to his reliance on a respirator and a mask that protects his face. One of his first fatalities involved the removal of his mask, to reveal a face so horrifying that it *literally* scares the soul out of his opponent.



EXPLODING YOURSELF, YOUR ENEMY… AND THE EARTH

SMOKE HAS ALWAYS been strange, his whole existence merged with the Sub-Zero moniker and the ninja brothers that go with it. Smoke's even weirder moves culminate in him firing a bajillion grenades out of himself and causing the world to explode.



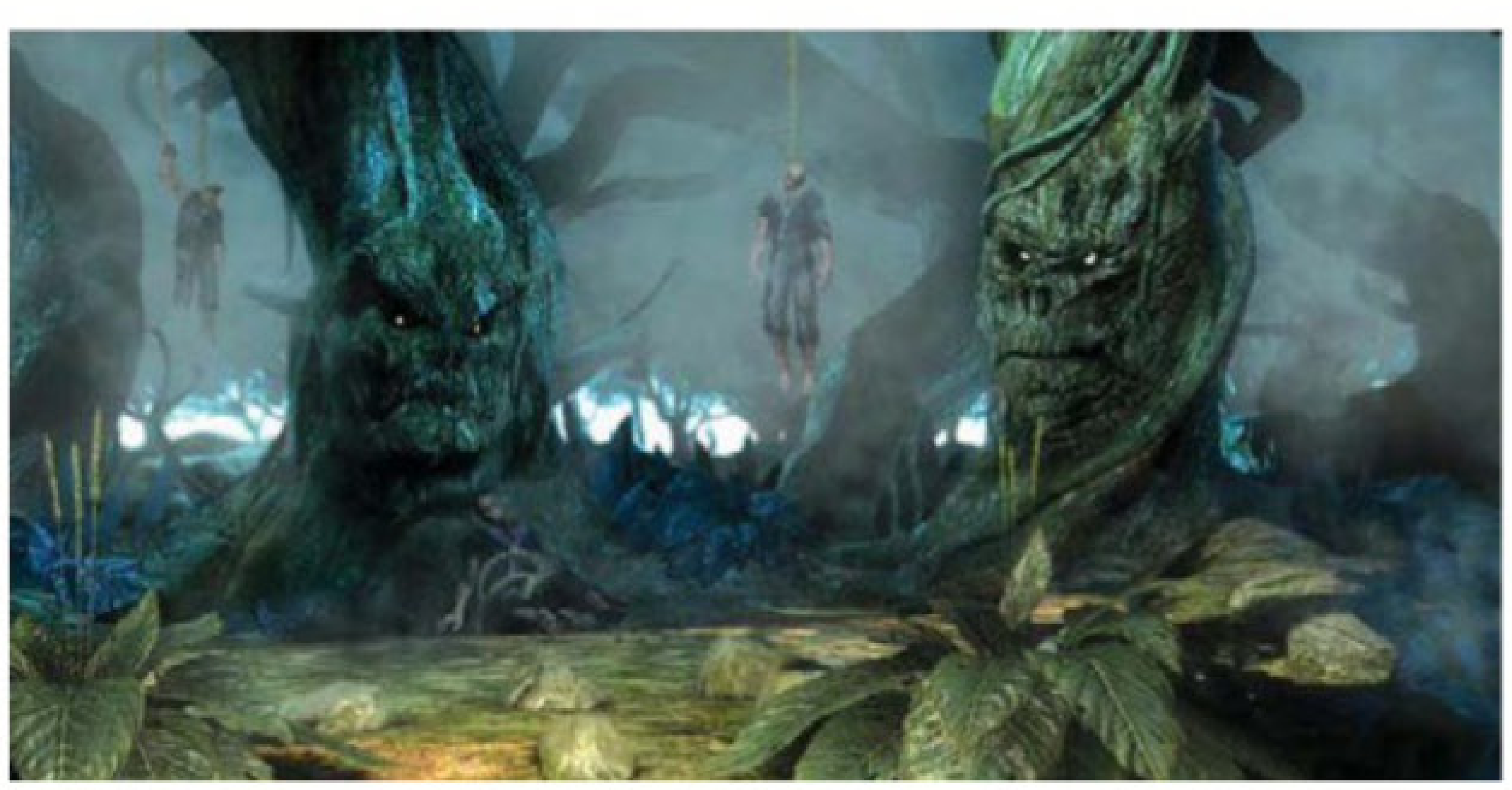
MEAT'S VERY EXISTENCE

ONE OF MORTAL KOMBAT 4'S hidden characters, Meat is supposed to be an experimental subject that escaped Shang Tsung's custody before whatever cruel intentions of the mad sorcerer were fulfilled. Completing all Group Mode challenges in *4* would make any character you select become Meat – so you couldn't escape him and his rotting flesh and his hanging eye.



THE REBOOT'S 'X-RAY' MOVES

DURING THE PR campaign for what the media would come to call *Mortal Kombat 9*, Ed Boon promised fans of the AWOL franchise that when they finally got the new game, they'd bask in its violent glory – promising it would be the most violent yet. Boon wasn't lying – fatalities aside, the 'X-Ray' moves alone could have satiated our gore-hunger.



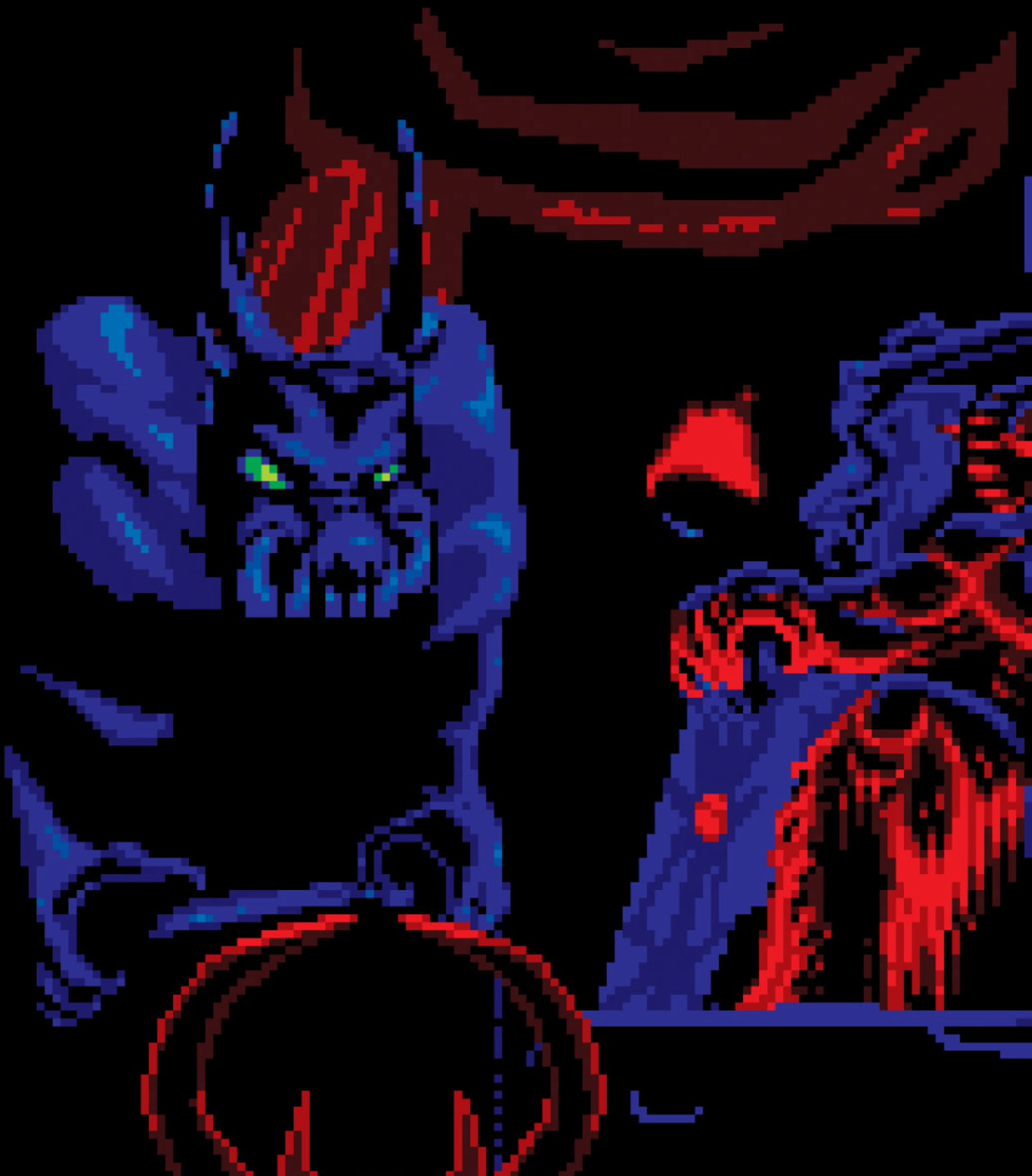
THE LIVING FOREST STAGE DEATH

THE LIVING FOREST is a staple arena in the *Mortal Kombat* series now, after being introduced in the second game. But it took until the ninth instalment of the core series – which travelled to a very self-aware 'reboot' timeline – for the game to allow you to kick an opponent into the trees, getting them crunched to bits by splintery wooden teeth…



QUAN CHI'S NEW FATALITY

WE'VE ONLY SEEN snippets of *Mortal Kombat X*, and had a few hands-on demos with it. The new graphics make all the blood and gore look more real than ever, and the result is some tremendously cringe-inducing fatalities. The worst so far? Quan Chi summons a dagger and drags his opponent onto it with his psychic powers, spins them round and splits their body in half.

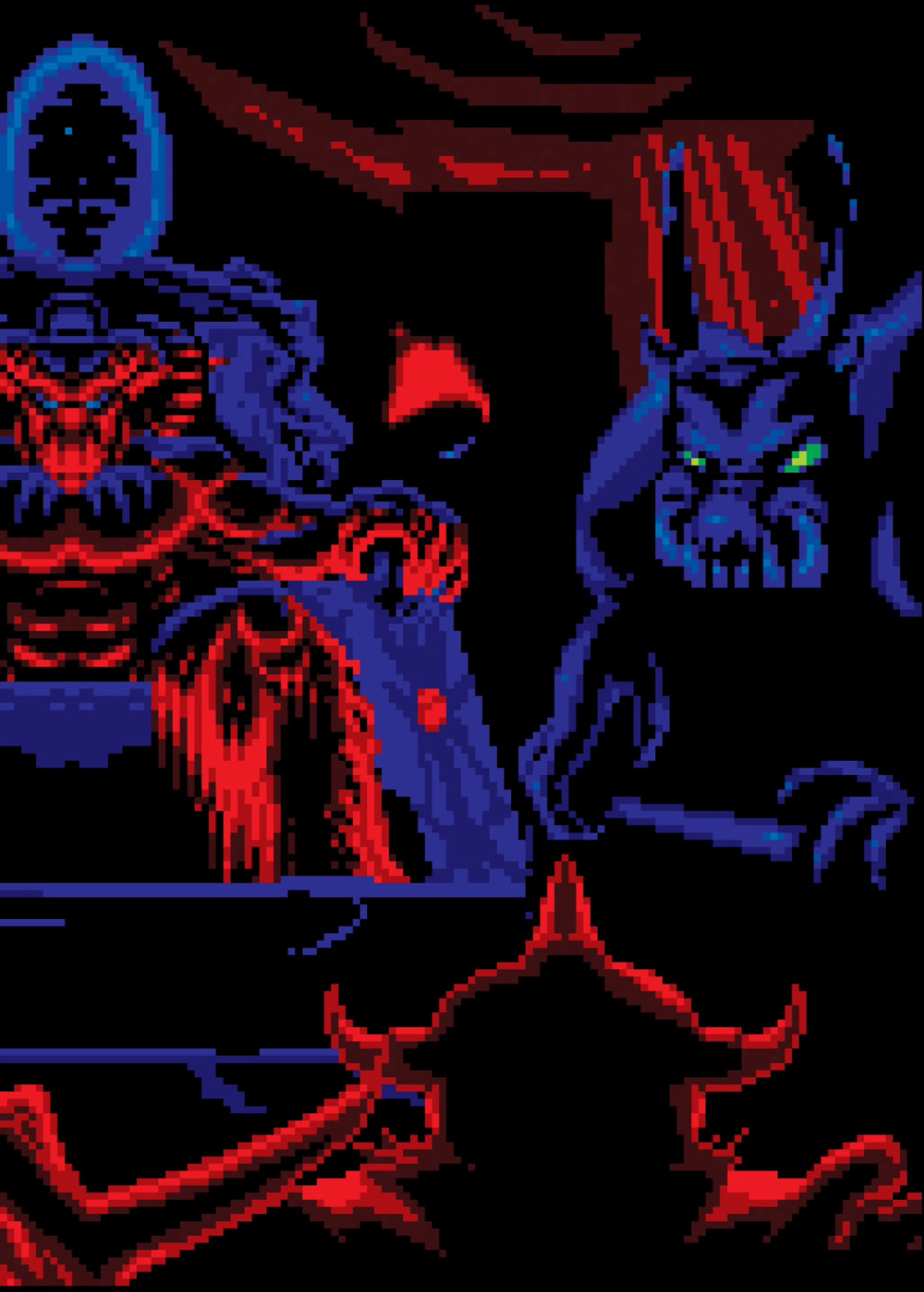


BEST INTRO

BLACKTHORNE

SNES, MS-DOS **1994**

SATANIC, FOREBODING AND illustrated with the most imposing midnight blues and arterial crimsons, the intro to Blizzard Entertainment's *Blackthorne* communicated the grim world of Tuul immediately. A cinematic platformer – a pioneer of the genre – *Blackthorne* relied on the rich fantasy of its archaic world to keep the player interested in its cruel level design and trial-and-error gameplay. By introducing you to a devilish and gothic castle of *pure evil* straight away, the game establishes its tone – both narratively and mechanically. You are the last bastion of the 'lightstone' – a McGuffin smuggled out of Tuul and hidden on Earth so that the shaman ruling over the cursed kingdom could be thwarted. You only need one wall of text and the snivelling words of a few devil-goblins ("What is your bidding sire?") to understand exactly how *Blackthorne* is going to treat you. It's a wonderfully pessimistic introduction.

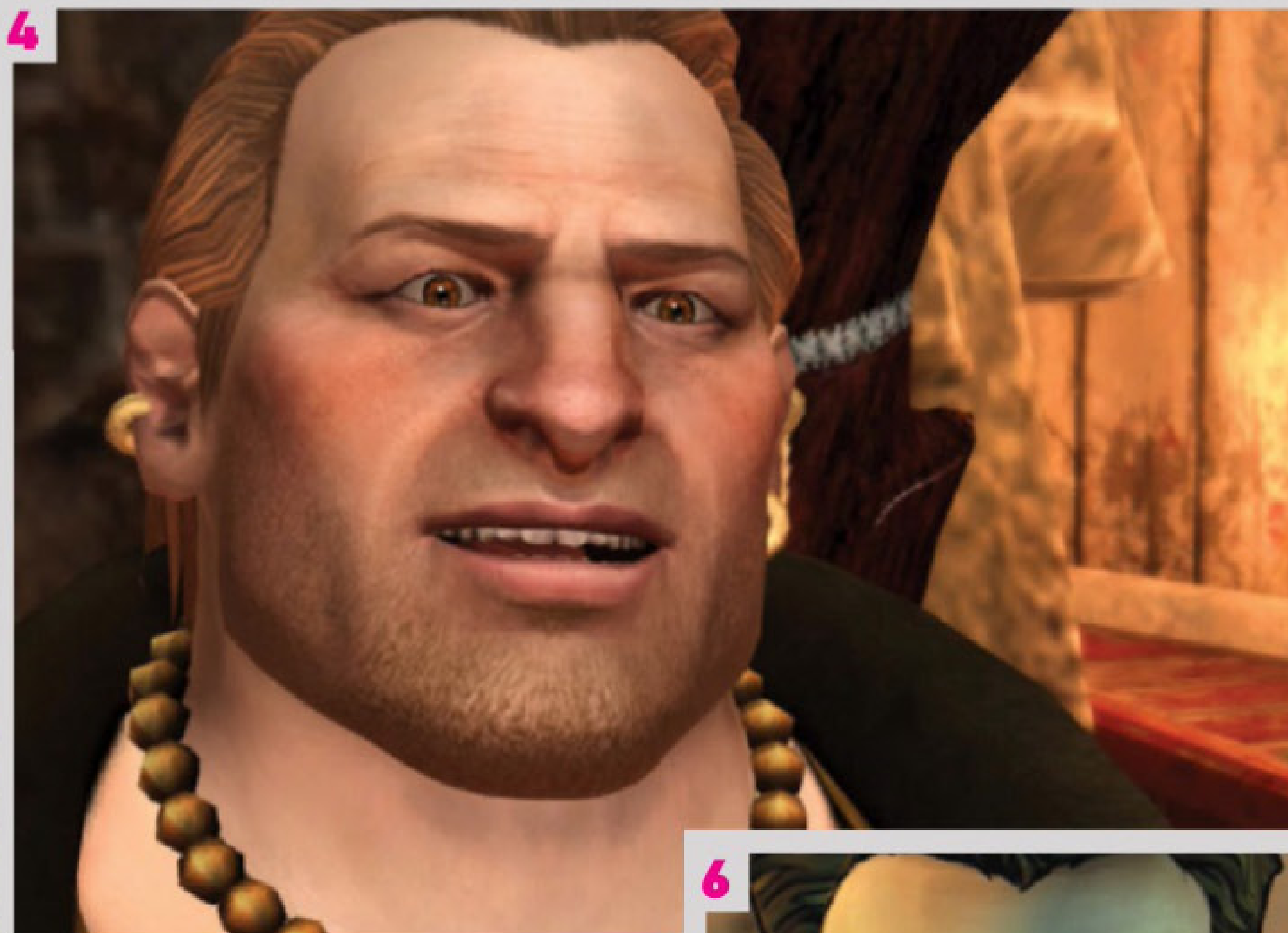


ESSENTIALS

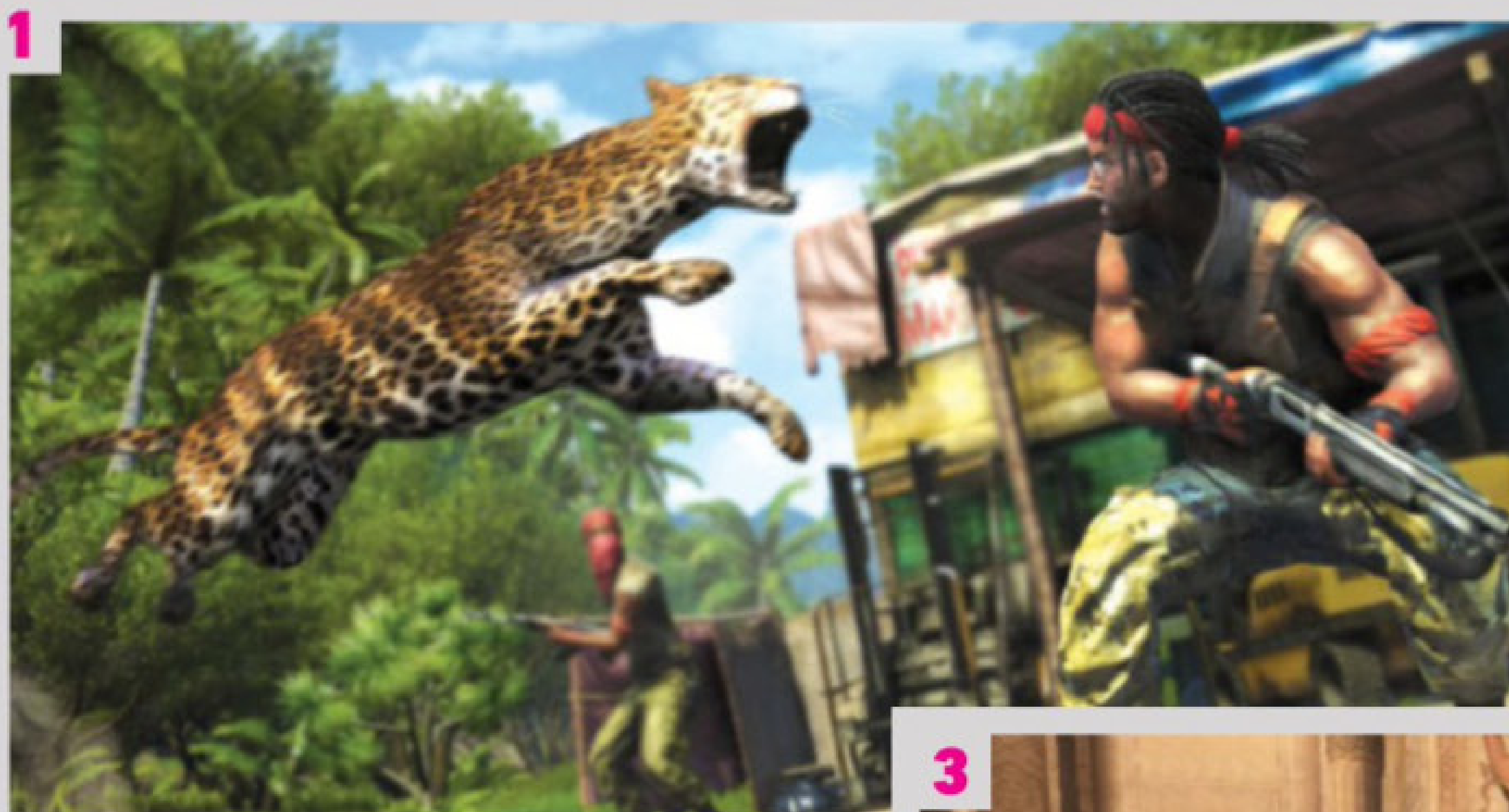
10 UNRELIABLE NARRATORS

An unreliable narrator is a narrator whose integrity and credibility is questionable, at the very best. Videogame writers and creators are beginning to adopt the unreliable narrator as a viable way of narratively framing their games, and to great effect – we've examined some of the best examples of gaming's unreliable narrators so far... Also, have an obligatory spoiler warning!

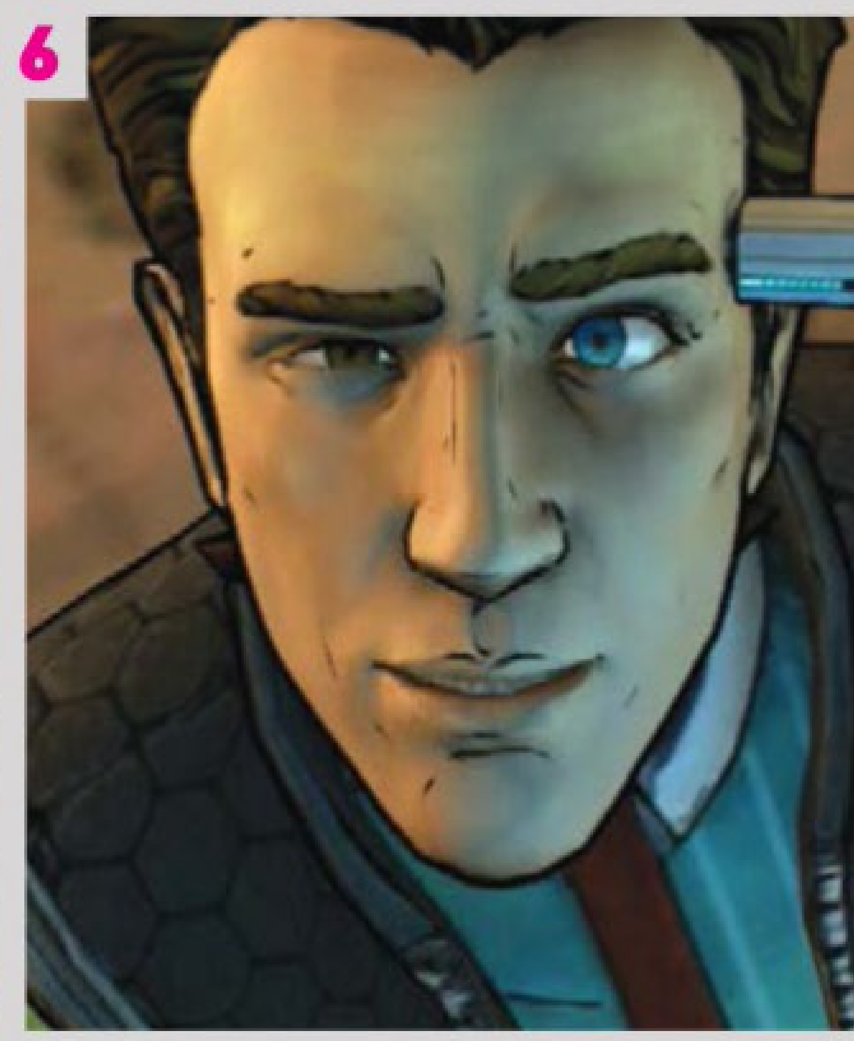
4



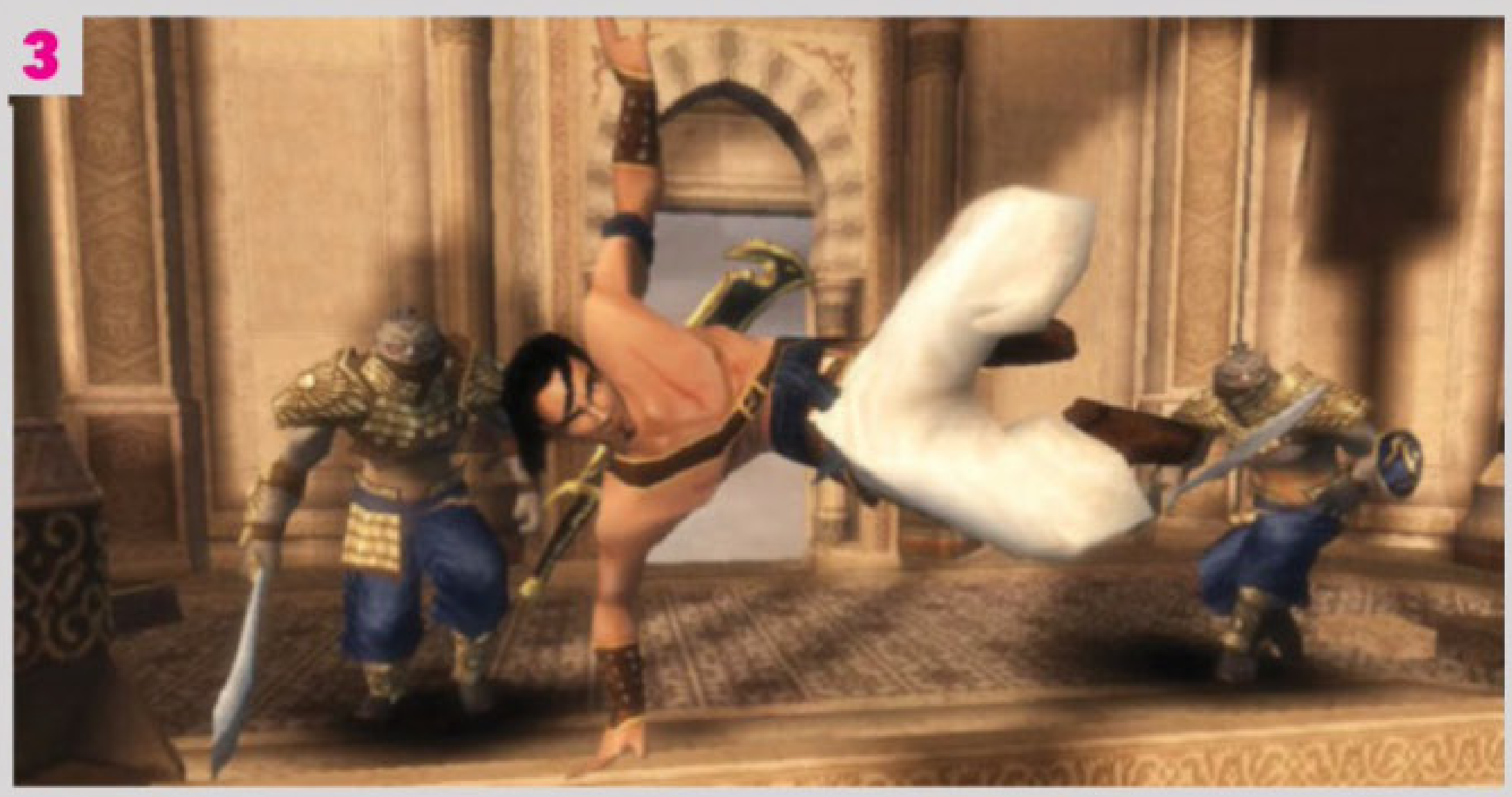
1



6



3



2



Jason Brody, Far Cry 3 (2012)
Writer: Jeffrey Yohalem

1 *Far Cry 3* was criticised for its writing at release, not least because prior to launch, writer Jeffrey Yohalem promised it would 'subvert videogame clichés'. Yet the sequel seemed riddled with them. Post-launch, Yohalem stated players had 'misinterpreted' the game, stating the story 'could be [...] solved, like a riddle. It's like a scavenger hunt where people aren't collecting the first clue'. The player, as Jason Brody, lives out a videogame fantasy – a completely subjective interpretation of events from a protagonist that's grown up in Hollywood. You view the world through *his* eyes, hence the disparity between reality and 'game-yness'.

Rucks, Bastion (2011)
Writer: Greg Kasavin

2 "Proper story's supposed to start at the beginning," states *Bastion*'s narrator, Rucks, at the outset of the game, "ain't so simple with this one". With that, *Bastion* sets its tone. Rucks introduces you to a fractured world, and by halfway through the game, you start to notice his perspective moves away from yours – as an unknowing agent in the world. He starts to offer criticism of *you*, of the choices you make, and there is nothing you can do about it but sit back and listen as his own opinions shape the world of *Bastion*, even if you have seen enough evidence to disagree with his (near constant) opining.

The Prince, Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time (2003)
Writer: Jordan Mechner

3 At the start of the game, you are a prince who's regaling a tale of mystery and suspicious oddness to a sceptical Princess – Farah, trapped in a tower. The Prince claims he's rewound time to prevent her death, and proceeds to tell her of an alternate future where she *will* die if he doesn't put his temporal buffoonery to good use – death is rewarded with the typical "no, no – that's not how it happened, shall I start again?" The Prince outlines how *true* this future is, but undercuts himself by complimenting his own 'fantastic story' so you're left wondering what events actually happened.

Varric, Dragon Age II (2011)
Writer: David Gaider, Jennifer Hepler

4 During the introduction and tutorial of *Dragon Age II*, Varric recalls a story in which this unbeatable hero cuts through a swathe of enemies, unstoppable, awe-inspiring. The eloquent dwarf's tale is cut short by Cassandra, though, and he's requested to tell the *real* version of events... in which the player finds themselves horrifically underpowered. It's an interesting marriage of narrative and mechanics, a refreshing way of seeing your character depowered. Varric lies again later, too, when he replaces *your whole party* with just himself and a gorgeously powerful crossbow as he hunts for his treacherous brother...

'Jacket', Hotline Miami (2013)
Writer: Jonathan Söderström, Dennis Wedin

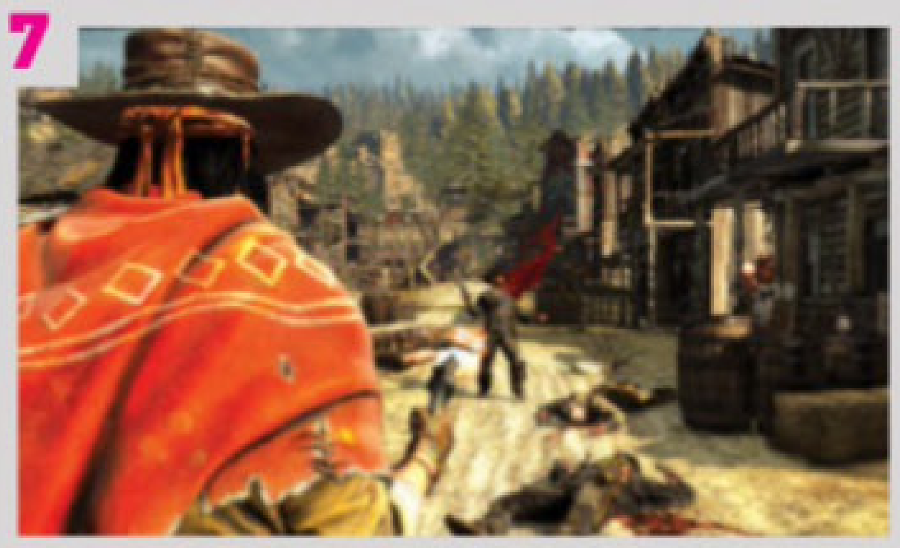
5 One of the most realistically violent games we've played (which says something when you consider it's top-down and made from pixel art), *Hotline Miami* isn't just a game: it's a commentary on society's relationship with violence and disassociation. You play as the unnamed protagonist – christened by fans as 'Jacket' – in a non-chronological recollection of events that he himself summons up. Bearing in mind that 'Jacket' is a junkie (who gets dealt to by a dealer that looks *surprisingly* like one of the devs...), you can never be sure if what you're playing is real, or a violent escapist fantasy.

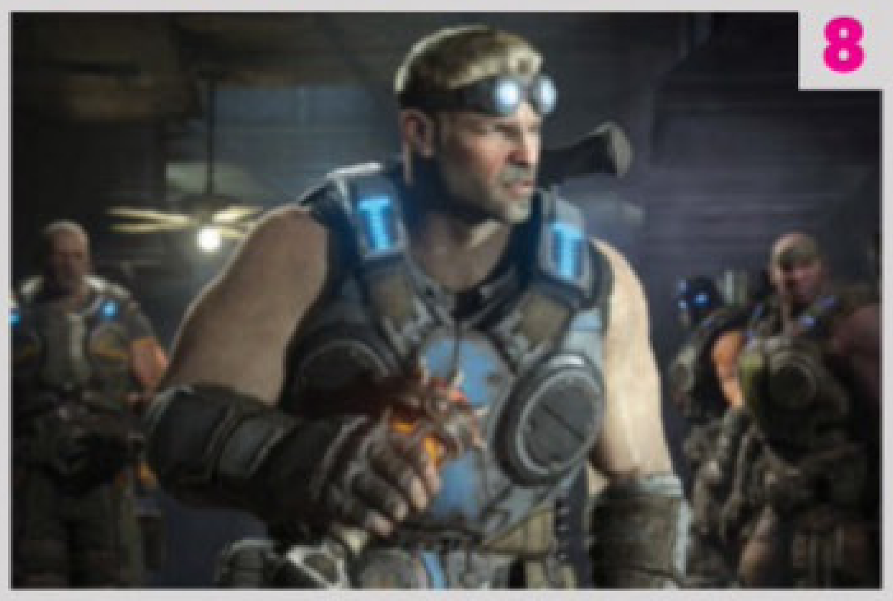


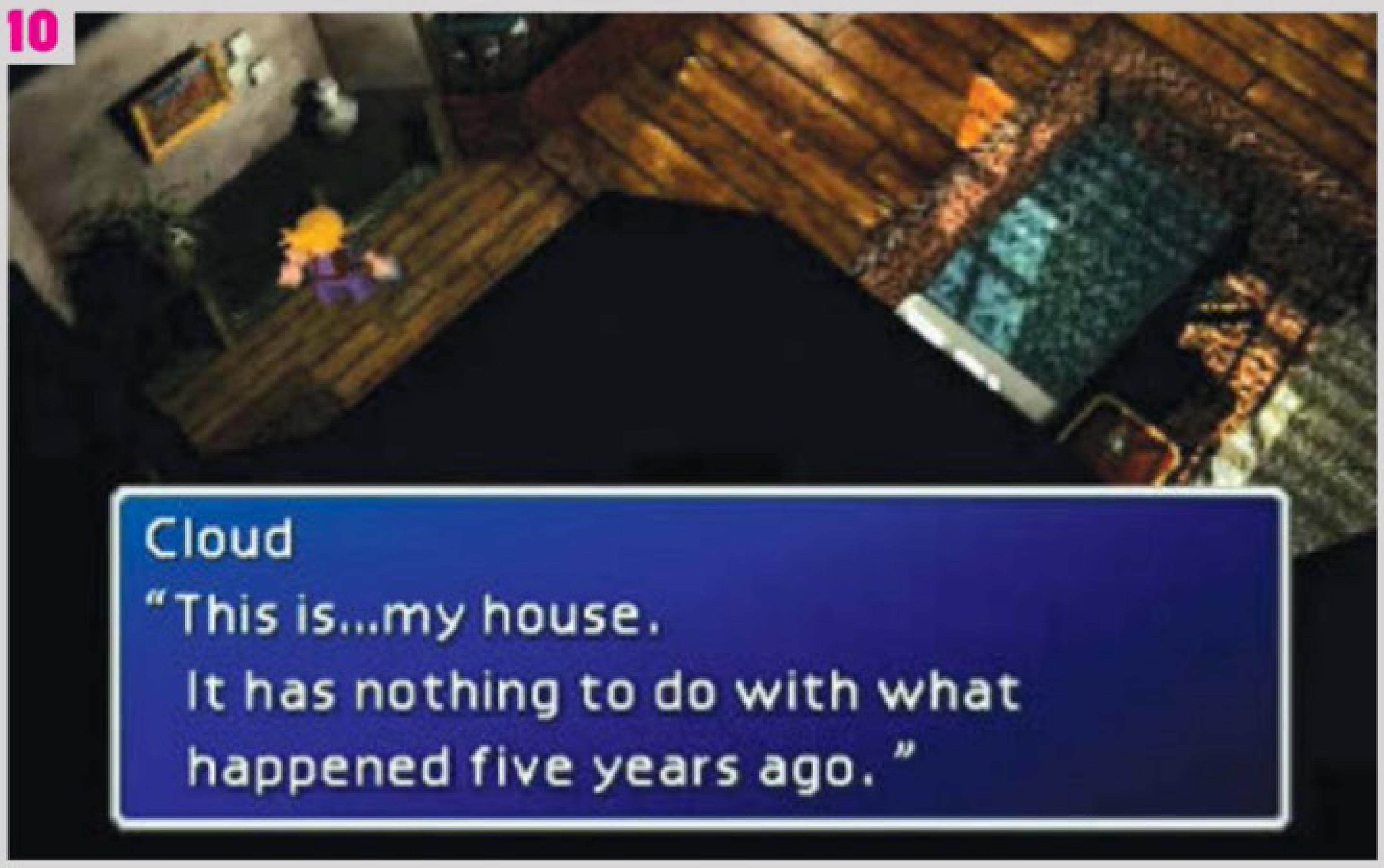












Rhys & Fiona, Tales From The Borderlands (2014)
Writer: Pierre Shorette, Adam Hines

6 The whole conceit of the first *Tales of the Borderlands* is that you're a conman – an ex-Hyperion slick – trying to deceive the fair citizens of Pandora into giving you a Vault Key worth a couple of hundred grand. Or at least, you think it is. You're introduced to Rhys as he's being dragged away into a compound, ready for an interrogation, and he recalls the story to his captor and his unwitting partner in crime, Fiona. But because *Tales From The Borderlands*' Rhys is a 'charismatic' guy, he can't help but embellish the truth a little – something that actually works really well with the choice-reliant Telltale mechanic.

Silas Greaves, Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger (2013)
Writer: Rafal W. Orkan, Haris Orkin

7 For an eight hour long arcade shooter, *Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger* experiments with some interesting narrative ideas. As Silas Greaves recounts his Wild West adventures, the grizzled cowboy will throw in the occasional twist that is mirrored in how you play the game. At one point you mishear his explanation of a group of enemies – "now hang on," he corrects, "I didn't say they were Apaches – I said they *fought* like Apaches!" Cue every enemy turning into cookie-cutter bandits, rather than Apaches. Greaves even begins making outlandish events up to see if you're listening.

Baird & Delta Squad, Gears Of War: Judgement (2013)
Writer: Rob Auten, Tom Bissell

8 You'd never really associate the brawny meat-heads of Delta Squad as particularly good storytellers, and that's perhaps why the narrative of *Gears Of War: Judgement* is all over the place. Being recounted from a court room, Baird and his buddies answer questions with the player able to choose how they answer. As such, you can determine the difficulty modifiers of the missions you play – "and we were only armed with pistols!" says Baird, and lo and behold you've just made the mission harder. It's an interesting structure, it's just a shame the game didn't innovate around it.

Tim, Braid (2008)
Writer: Jonathan Blow

9 *Braid* riffs on the age-old *Mario* trope of a male protagonist searching for a way to save 'his' princess from imprisonment in some far off area. But *Braid*'s central character is an unreliable narrator – it makes you think that you're the hero, looking to save this poor girl. But the puzzles and levels seem to make up some weird superego or id of our avatar, and as the game progresses, you start to realise that maybe – just *maybe* – you're actually tormenting the poor locked up princess, not saving her. The implicit presentation of this narration isn't obvious on the first playthrough, but it's there if you look for it.

Cloud Strife, Final Fantasy VII (1997)
Writer: Kazushige Nojima

10 Cloud is little more than a boy when we first meet him, an insecure abandonee with delusions of grandeur. He's one of the first unreliable narrators we can think of in a JRPG – the entire story, your motivations, your view of the world and your history with primary big-bad Sephiroth is shaped by Cloud's lies: he tells everyone he meets he was a SOLDIER, when in fact it was his doomed friend Zack that Cloud practically assumed the identity of in hopes of living out his life. The narration is a bit more obscure with Cloud, but we include him here because he acts as the agent to Gaia, warping your initial vision of the world.

THE VAULT

GIOTECK HC-5 WIRELESS GAMING HEADSET

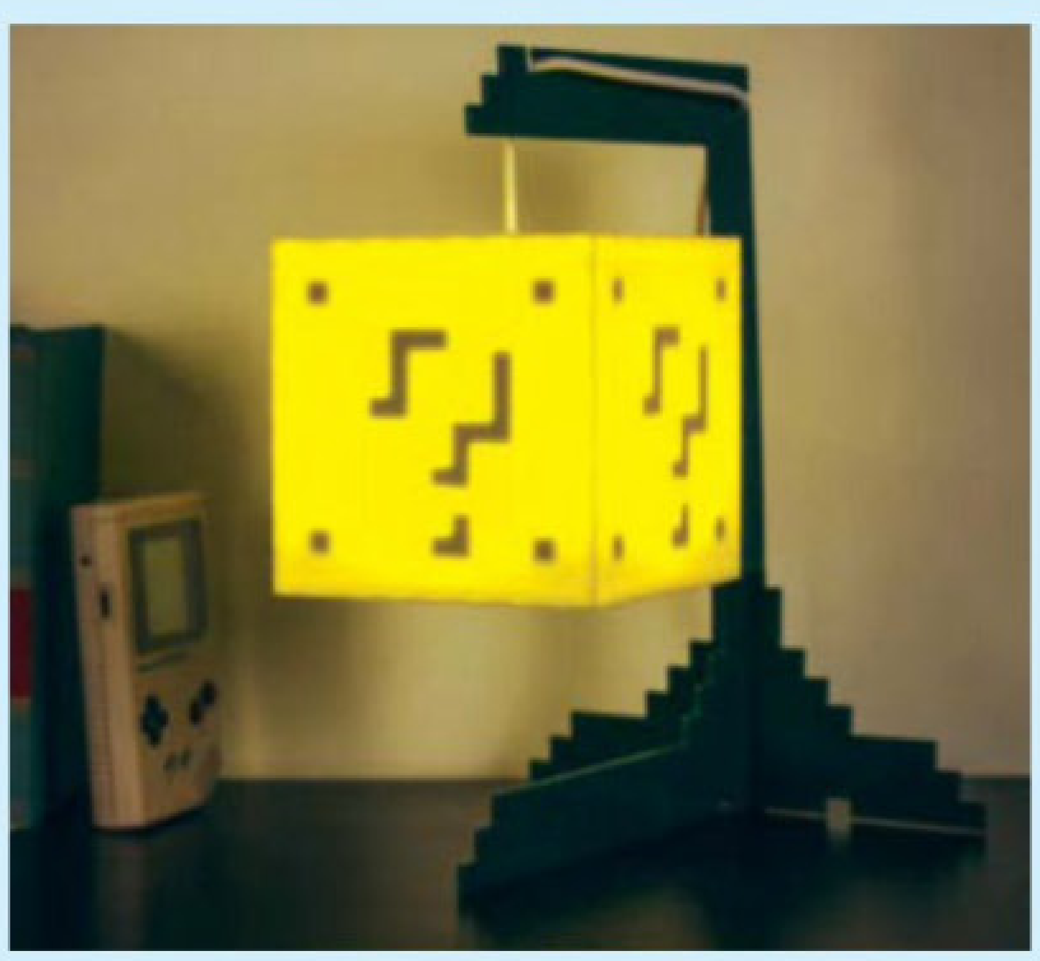


MANUFACTURER: **GIOTECK** PRICE: **£59.99**

IT'S PRETTY DAMNED tough to compete in the packed gaming headphones market right now. In fact, between the dominating presence of the big three – Razer, Tritton and Turtle Beach – there really isn't a lot of scope for new products to break into the saturated space. However, that doesn't mean Gioteck isn't ready and willing to try. In fact, if you're after great performance headphones and you're operating on a tight budget, the company's HC-5s do a pretty great job of fully immersing you in videogame sound.

Equipped with 40mm drivers, these headphones offer a surprisingly deep and rich sound, with a balanced treble and mid-range that really shines on games with incredible audio production – such as *Battlefield 4* and *Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare*. The low-end rumbles along nicely, and there's even a bass boost option for those of you that feel like rupturing your eardrums is an enjoyable way to spend the weekend.

The oversized cans are comfortable, even after long gameplay sessions, and can be easily recharged after five or so hours of use via USB. The only real concerns we have with the HC-5 can be levied at the headset's microphone. We noticed inconsistent issues with our microphone cutting out sound across both Xbox One and PlayStation 4. For the price, this amplified stereo headset is one of the best available. That said, you might be better off saving up the extra cash and opting for the virtual 7.1 surround sound Turtle Beach Stealth 500Xs if you can afford it.



THE QUESTION BLOCK LAMP

Try as we might, nostalgia has a horrible hold over us. This *Super Mario*-themed lamp destroyed its Kickstarter campaign. Perhaps it's the adorable 8-bit sound effects it emits as you punch the bottom to switch it on.

www.firebox.com



PLAYSTATION COASTERS VOL. 1

20 years ago, the thought of using our beloved copy of *WipEout* as a coaster would have horrified us. Now, well, we're beginning to think it is rather quaint. Show your retro love, while keeping a tidy surface to boot.

www.yellowbulldog.co.uk



LINK ACTION FIGURE

Skyward Sword was pretty great, wasn't it? Show your love of Nintendo's stunning action game by getting this highly detailed and super posable Link figure to adorn your desk. It even comes with a window display box.

www.geekvault.co.uk

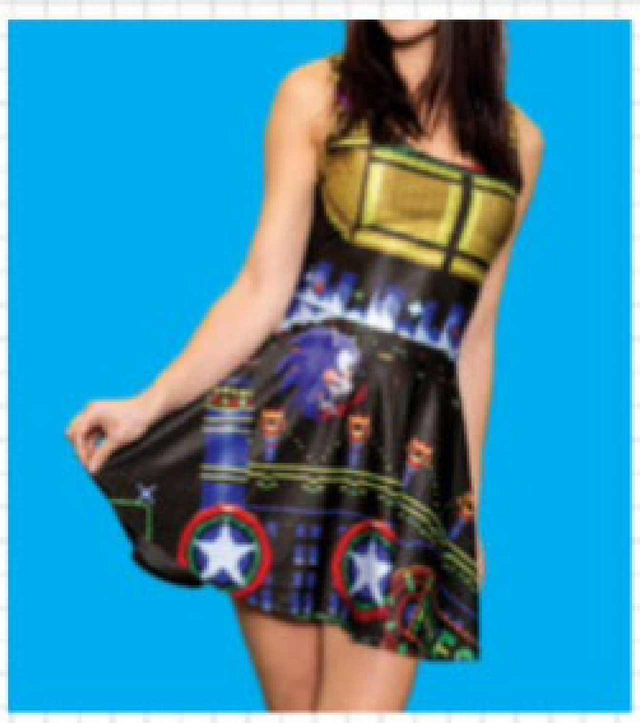
GAMING CLOTHING



PLAYER

We aren't sure varsity jackets are the proper way to celebrate 20 years of gaming, but we can't balk at the quality of this thing. You've lived PlayStation, now it's time to wear it.

www.insertcoinclothing.com



CASINO NIGHTS

Casino Nights is just hands down one of the greatest *Sonic* levels to ever whizz past us in a blur. Make the statement for us, cause we just can't pull off this dress – believe us, we tried.

www.Insertcoinclothing.com



SUNSHINE

We're aware *Super Mario* movies haven't turned out fantastically in the past, but one look at this gorgeous print and we suddenly have faith that one day a realistic interpretation might just work.

www.threadless.com

THE WITCHER ADVENTURE GAME

SOLD BY: **FORBIDDEN PLANET** PRICE: **£44.99**



WILD HUNT MAY have been delayed, but that doesn't mean you can't still get your *Witcher* kicks in the meantime. CD Projekt RED has done a wonderful job of translating the popular franchise to the tabletop with *The Witcher Adventure Game*, letting you and up to three friends take on the roles of some of your favourite characters in this stunning universe. You'll complete quests, battle monsters and explore the dangerous wilds, all the while creating an intriguing narrative that's unique to each and every game. It's a lot of fun and easy to pick up and play.

www.forbiddenplanet.com

X-COM: THE BOARD GAME

SOLD BY: **FORBIDDEN PLANET**
PRICE: **£44.99**



SO, YOU AREN'T content with playing *X-COM* on every single device you own, and now you want it to dominate your spare tabletop space as well? Fantasy Flight has done an admirable job of taking the tense turn-based action the acclaimed sci-fi franchise is known for and making it accessible enough for four friends to jump in and battle for global defence shoulder-to-shoulder. Not only that, the game also connects to a cool companion app, just in case you want to make the game a little harder for yourself as well.

www.forbiddenplanet.com

STARTER POKER SET: JUSTICE LEAGUE

SOLD BY: **FORBIDDEN PLANET** PRICE: **£24.99**



THERE IS A right way and a wrong way to enjoy poker, and we're starting to think that we've been doing it wrong for a great many years now. Themed poker sets are nothing new – but it's not every day we get to see new illustrations from acclaimed DC and Marvel cover artist Kevin Nowlan. This set includes a full deck of beautifully drawn cards, not to mention 20 rather cool *Justice League* poker chips. You'll be desperate to whip this set out at your next poker night.

www.forbiddenplanet.com

SNOW FIGHT: A WARCRAFT TALE

PUBLISHER: **BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT**



AFTER RECENTLY CELEBRATING its tenth anniversary, *World Of Warcraft* shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, Blizzard Entertainment has been open about its desire to keep Azeroth populated for another decade. But how can the developer possibly hope to keep those subscription numbers up? If its latest venture is any indication, it's to start 'em young and hope they ask for a 60-day game card for their next birthday.

Snow Fight: A Warcraft Tale is a completely new type of *Warcraft* adventure; an original children's book exploring the power of friendship and understanding the importance of overcoming bullying on a snowy day in Azeroth – seriously, we wish this was required reading for every player on PvP servers before they are allowed into Stranglethorn Vale for the first time. While *Snow Fight* has been designed for kids, it is adorable enough that we can't imagine any *WOW* fan not falling in love with the style and execution near instantly. Written by Blizzard's senior VP Chris Metzen, with illustrations from long-time *Warcraft* artist Wei Wang, *Snow Fight* is a faithful and fun addition to the universe. Sure, you'll need to overcome seeing Thrall, Varian, and Arthas as friends, but that shouldn't cause too many problems.

Fun, cute and immensely re-readable, we just wish there was more of it to enjoy. Kids will love the illustrations and you'll love the entertaining depictions of *Warcraft*'s biggest characters. Blizzard, if you're reading, you'd be fools to not get an animated series in the works based on the concept – because we would watch the living hell out of it.

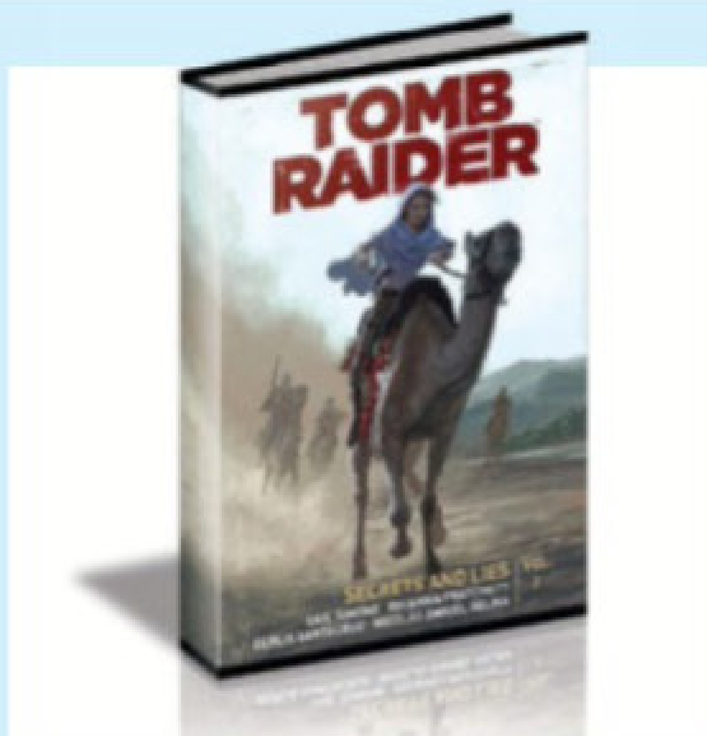
VERDICT 9/10



MORTAL KOMBAT X VOL. 1

If you're a total *Mortal Kombat* lore junkie, perhaps you'll be willing to overlook the sloppy storytelling and poor writing found in DC's latest attempt to convert videogames to the comic book format. If you *really* need the back story to *Mortal Kombat X* go right ahead, but don't say we didn't warn you.

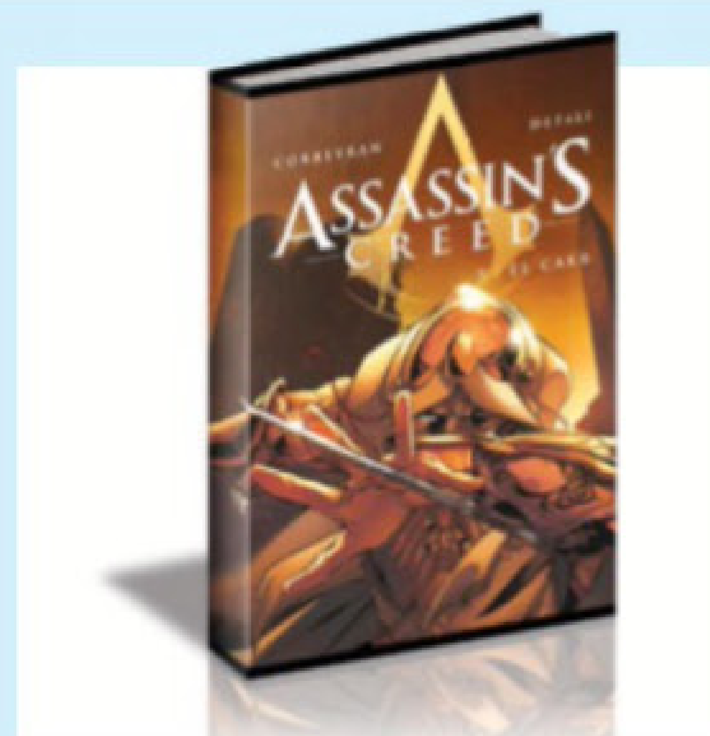
www.forbiddenplanet.com



TOMB RAIDER VOL. 2 SECRETS AND LIES

So what if Crystal Dynamics is keeping quiet? Rhianna Pratchett and Gail Simone are doing a great job of continuing Lara's story ahead of *Rise Of The Tomb Raider*. We've been enjoying this monthly; it's well worth getting your pre-order in for Volume 2 early.

www.forbiddenplanet.com



ASSASSIN'S CREED: EL CAKR VOL. 5

How are you feeling about *Assassin's Creed* heading to Victorian London? If you're after an *AC* experience without any bugs (of the technical nature, at least) try *Vol 5* of the long-running comic series. It's an adventure set in 13th Century Egypt, and it's pretty awesome.

www.titanbooks.com

games™

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.gamestm.co.uk
www.greatdigitalmags.com

Magazine team

Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
☎ 01202 586213
Editor In Chief **Ryan King**
Staff Writer **Dom Peppiatt**
Production Editor **Rebecca Richards**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Assistant Designer **Kym Winters**
Photographer **James Sheppard**
Publishing Director **Aaron Asadi**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

Contributors

Luke Albigés, Adam Barnes, Alex Dantanus, Jon Denton, Ross Hamilton, Stace Harman, Darran Jones, Alex Lemcovich, Graeme Mason, Denis Murphy, John Robertson, Chris Schilling, Chris Scullion, Josh West, Hannah Westlake

Cover Image

© 2015 Electronic Arts. All rights reserved.

Advertising

Digital or printed media packs are available on request.
Head of Sales Hang Deretz ☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Account Manager Anthony Godsell ☎ 01202 586420
anthony.godsell@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International

games™ is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401 licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions

For subscription enquiries email:
gamestm@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ UK 0844 848 8429
☎ Overseas +44 1795 592 864
13 issue subscription UK – £52.00
13 issue subscription Europe – £70.00
13 issue subscription ROW – £80.00

Circulation

Head of Circulation Darren Pearce ☎ 01202 586200

Production

Production Director Jane Hawkins ☎ 01202 586200

Founder

Group Managing Director Damian Butt

Printing & Distribution

Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Ind. Estate, Poole, Dorset, BH16 5SN
☎ 01202 628 300
Distributed in the UK, Eire & the Rest of the World by Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU ☎ 0203 148 3300
www.marketforce.co.uk
Distributed in Australia by Network Services (a division of Bauer Media Group), Level 21 Civic Tower, 66-68 Goulburn Street, Sydney, New South Wales 2000, Australia
☎ +61 2 8667 5288

ISSN 1478-5889

SO, THE EVIL IS PURGED
FIRE PURIFIES ALL.
THE BONES ARE ASHES.
SOON TO BE DUST.
GAMES™ IS DEAD
AND THE NIGHTMARE IS ENDED.

......OR HAS IT?



games™ 159, 26 March